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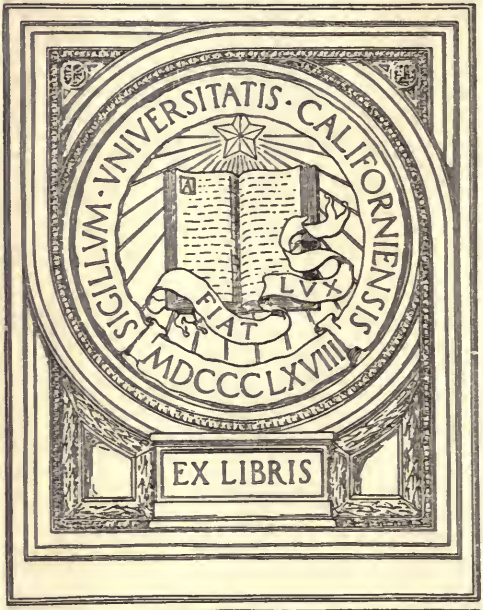

To Mildred Sweet
from her Mother 1918

Miss Mildred Sweet
2024 Cerritos Ave
Long Beach
Cal

With Love from
Mother

1919.

WHAT GIRLS CAN DO.

"NOT TO BE MINISTERED UNTO, BUT TO MINISTER."

BY

MRS. H. K. POTWIN.

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What Girls Can Do.

CHAPTER I.

UNCLE ERIC.

At the age of ten Clare Hamlin's education passed into the keeping of her father's younger brother, Eric. It came about in this manner. Mrs. Hamlin intended her daughters, Clare and Dorothy, to be fitted to fill the position in fashionable society which she had herself held with entire satisfaction. To accomplish this, in connection with the other branches of a good education both girls were early put upon a course of music, which one loved as birds love to sing, while Clare turned from the necessary drill as a sensitive nature shrinks from inharmonious sounds, conscious of her inability to produce any other.

At this early age Clare developed decided tastes, and knew that sound and motion were not among them; as well she understood that form, shape, and color gave the impulse to awaken her

to life and energy. The pencil was her cherished tool, and every cloud above, every tree that upreared its graceful shape, every branch and pencilled twig, every varying leaf moving in the wind, every flower or shape of loveliness, spoke to her responsive nature in language which the pretty Dot would never understand—Dot two years younger, brimming over with music and grace.

Mrs. Hamlin was unaware of the mistake she was making in this attempt to form two natures, so unlike, in the same mould, and would in her eager ambition have persevered to the end, had not the young uncle with stern common sense broken the spell and opened her eyes.

They made a sweet picture this winter afternoon in their mother's large, sunny room, dressed and ready for the carriage to take them to their weekly dancing lessons. There was satisfaction in every line of the mother's beautiful face as she smoothed a curl or arranged a fold, a finishing touch to a perfect toilet.

Dot was rehearsing, moving about the room with the freedom and grace of a bird on the wing; but Clare stood pale and spiritless, looking upon her sister with utter discouragement.

"Clare dear, don't look so moody; you distress me."

"I don't feel moody, mamma. But don't

send me. If you knew how I hated it, you 'd let Dot go without me. I shall never learn. I can't, I do n't want to."

"But, Clare, you must try to learn. This is perfect folly. It 's just so every week. There 's Dot as pleasant and obedient as a fairy."

"Because she likes it, because she is fairy-like and can do anything with her feet. My feet *wont* dance, and I can't make them. I do n't see any sense in it."

"Why, Clare, it 's only to think of your feet all the time until you learn; then they go themselves. There! only so—and so—and then so—do n't you see how easy?" chirped a little sprite in blue silk, dancing curls, and a fair sunny face, the embodiment of good-nature.

The elder sister looked on with a most discouraged air, her mother giving the last touches to the hair that had been heated and crimped and frizzed to make it more like Dot's natural curls. Then Clare's skirt must be lifted a little here or twisted a trifle there, for nothing seemed to sit naturally upon her immature form as it did on Dot's round loveliness.

"Of course it 's easy, if your sister would try to please me; there 's nothing else wanting."

"Oh, mamma, you know I love to please you. I have tried, and it was all for you."

"Well, well, do n't cry and make your eyes

red. Turn out your toes. Look at Dot. She never toes in," said the mother impatiently.

"I know it," sighed Clare. Poor child! All Dot's graces and loveliness, her charming postures, and bright, funny speeches, were stereotyped upon her heavy, discouraged heart. Dot was lovely; everybody praised her. The father caught her in his arms with a kiss, tossed her to the ceiling, gave her rides on his broad shoulder, and laughed at every word she spoke. The mother looked on admiringly; the servants praised and petted her; even Uncle Eric came from his den to bask in her sprightliness occasionally; while poor Clare was poked and stirred and ordered to hold up her head, turn out her toes, straighten her spine, and look happy, from morning till night.

Look happy! She had n't much to make her happy. To be sure they tried hard to give her hair a graceful curl; she had the same lovely costumes and as many as Dot; and she was driven to dancing-school every week by the admiring coachman, and seated at the piano two weary hours a day, sick or well. But she could not extract happiness from it as Dot did.

"There's the carriage. Now, Clare, don't crush your skirt or get your sash askew, and be sure and watch Dot; you'll soon learn the new steps. You know I can't take you into company

unless you are graceful. There, there, child! Toes! toes! turn them out. Do remember!"

They were off, one face the embodiment of brightness, the other a picture of weary discouragement.

Mrs. Hamlin turned to see her brother standing in the doorway, his hand grasping firmly the portière, with a peculiar expression on his face.

She threw back her head in a defiant, impatient way and said,

"What is it, Eric? The same old story?"

"Yes, my sister. Not to discuss now the grave question whether it is right for parents, especially Christian parents, to have their children learn to dance, it's a mistake for Clare because she doesn't like it, and in my opinion it's a mistake for Dot because she *does* like it so well. I am sure when you look at it from the Christian mother's standpoint you will see it so and drop that feature of their education. Besides, you are trying to form the rose and the honeysuckle on the same model, whereas one *can* stand independently and the other *must* twine and climb."

"I think I get your meaning, Eric; but I want Clare to be graceful, as Dot seems to be naturally. I'm sure I don't know what else to do. I would not make a mistake in training them, but Clare wont learn, and yet I don't think the child is stubborn."

"Far from it, she 's discouraged. How would you like to go to Mrs. Atherton's reception and be ordered to copy little Mrs. Kendall's mincing walk or the majestic Mrs. Pendleton's deep voice? to have your best friend assure you that you made a wretched appearance, and could never improve unless you upset all your own individuality and adopted that of some one else?"

"Why, Eric, it is not a case in point at all."

"I think it is."

"But you 'll acknowledge that Dot is grace itself."

"Clare has as much grace of another type, and to me just as beautiful. My only fear is that you will deprive her of it."

"Dear me, Eric, what then shall I do?"

"Will you do it, if I tell you?"

"Perhaps so. What is it? Something unheard of, I 've no doubt."

"Let her alone, entirely and altogether, for a time. Give her a rest, a chance to breathe. Let her react and come back to her normal state of mind and body; for Clare is half sick."

"What! Let her give up dancing?"

"By all means, if she wishes to."

"Why not say music also? Have her come up a block, and done with it."

"I do say so. Let the music go; she does n't

like it, never will, any more than she can dance. If you insist upon making a machine of her, give her a hand-organ and monkey; then while the hands are in motion the brain can work at something she enjoys, and life will not be all wasted."

"Eric, you are a crank! By-and-by you'll have me give up all control of my child."

"I think if you keep up this kind of control, the Lord will soon interfere."

"What do you mean now?" with a deep flush of impatience.

"I mean, seriously, that this false life, so different from what her nature craves, is sapping her vitality. Dot can bear it; her nerves are thickly covered. Clare's seem to be on the outside, and are irritated daily, more than I could endure. Let her alone a year; watch her as closely as you like; pet her as you do Dot. By that time I think you'll discover grace enough, and tastes to cultivate that will make her as charming in society as Dot's fingers and feet will make her."

He turned abruptly and went back to his study, while Mrs. Hamlin pondered the subject, called up all Clare's gentle, loving words and shy, modest ways, until her heart grew very tender, and she was filled with shame that she had given the child reason to doubt her love.

She was impatient to have them back. She would make amends to the sensitive, shrinking, discouraged girl, and be more careful in the future; but she hardly thought it best to allow her to discontinue the dancing and music; what other accomplishments could she have? With her bashful, awkward ways she would be a constant annoyance to herself and friends as she grew older. No, she could not yield everything to Eric's whims.

The afternoon grew dark; the day was short, and the room was ablaze with gas before the sound of carriage-wheels reached her. She looked up eagerly to greet them. Dot came bounding in and flew to kiss her mother as usual. But this time she was quickly disposed of, and Mrs. Hamlin reached out both hands to Clare, who had followed languidly up the stairs and into the warm, bright room. What a contrast she seemed to the rosy Dot!

"Come here, Clare darling. What is the matter with mother's little girl?"

Clare looked wonderingly into her mother's eyes as she was drawn upon her lap; then, dropping her head upon her shoulder, she cried as she had not for many a day.

"Clare 's sick, mamma. She has a headache, and madame would make her dance. She was real cross to her, and took hold of her shoulders

and walked her around quick and jerky and spoke sharply to her. I was so angry that I danced badly on purpose, but Clare only grew pale and did n't speak."

"Cruelty to dumb animals is nothing to it," said Uncle Eric over his evening paper.

The mother wiped her eyes, soothed and kissed her, and bathed the tired little head until the persecuted child grew calm. Then she said,

"Clare, my darling, mother is going to let you give up all this business that you do n't like. You need n't go again."

She roused at once, saying, "Never again? Oh, mamma, I 'll do anything to please you," winding her arms around her mother's neck and nestling close to her warm cheek.

"You always have, dear. Mother is going to try and please you now; so no more dancing or music."

"Music too! Oh thank you, mamma!"

Clare curled down again in her mother's arms with a sense of rest that was new and sweet. Mrs. Hamlin sighed; she had hoped Clare would have liked to go on with the last accomplishment.

Uncle Eric's paper was laid aside and his face beamed upon the group.

"Now, my wise sister, if you would perfect a good work, put Clare into long-sleeved flannel,

thick and warm from neck to ankle, and give her to me. I want company on my morning tramps. I don't ask any better. Hey, Clare?"

"Oh, mamma, will you? Oh how delightful! Oh, Uncle Eric!" Clare flew to the table and found herself speedily enveloped in her uncle's loose study gown. The mother, looking on, said to herself,

"I believe the child would be graceful if she could forget herself; to be sure we have never given her a chance."

"And what shall I do, uncle?" asked Dot.

"You? Oh you must keep on with your dancing for the present; butterfly-life is what you like, and one pupil is enough for me."

A week later Dot and her mother stood by the window. In the street below Uncle Eric's cutter waited, and presently he appeared with Clare clad in a dark warm suit of waterproof, with thick boots and woollen leggins, looking comfortable and happy. She ran gayly down the steps, waited to fling a kiss back to the window, then Uncle Eric caught her up, calling her a bag of corn, and tossed her into the seat, tucking the robes closely about her. In a moment they were off, and from that day Clare's future grew brighter and brighter.

At night Mrs. Hamlin asked,

"Do you wish her to give up school, Eric, and all study? Is she to grow up quite a dunce?"

"Just as Clare herself says. She is to decide for this year, you know. I 'm ready to advise."

"Clare, are you intending to leave school?" asked the mother, half amused and a little provoked that her brother should carry his eccentricities so far.

"Why, mamma, I shall do as you say. I can't be happy not to."

"What do you say, Clare, to studying with me in the library?"

"And recite to you, Uncle Eric?"

"Yes, occasionally, when we can't tramp; take plenty of time and fit for the high school by a short cut?"

"I 'd like that, oh so much."

"Preposterous!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamlin.

"It might be for Dot, but Clare must not for the present be confined to rules: she must have entire freedom of motion; we can trust her. She shall take her exercise with me before I begin my work, and study one hour each morning and afternoon; then she can be with you or anywhere the rest of the time. Try it one year, and if you do n't find improvement I shall be mistaken."

"Are you going to take Clare all away from

me, Uncle Eric? I don't like that," sang Dot, catching his hand and swinging herself round him.

"I don't believe anything will ever disturb you seriously, pet. Go on with your peculiar efforts; these chubby fingers will thrill the world some day. But Clare's talents are hidden in head and heart, and we are going to hunt them out."

As the time slipped by Mrs. Hamlin's friends commented harshly sometimes upon the favor shown to one child, while the other was denied the graceful accomplishments a young girl in her position should enjoy. Why she was kept so closely at home could be accounted for in no other way.

Dot Hamlin, as she was familiarly called, won her way straight into and over all hearts. The sunny nature and musical voice of the happy child charmed every one.

All this time Clare was living in a world of her own. Her uncle had taken her from her mother's hands none too soon. The poor little heart was empty, the mind shrunken and starving. She was waiting to be filled.

She was not indifferent to sweet sounds; they soothed and delighted her; but they must come from another source; she had no power to call them forth herself. The pleasure of drum-

ming with a stick on tin would have been less monotonous to her sensitive ear than her practising had been. And the decided failure she had made in dancing effectually deprived her of any desire to mingle with gay friends for that purpose as she grew older. The soul had been harshly dealt with, bound with heavy, invisible chains that would soon have transformed a loving girl into a cold, unfeeling statue. Uncle Eric had wisely snapped the bands and emancipated her. Day by day and week by week he led her along, watching closely the drift of her mind and studying its increasing capabilities, until he was sure she might be urged safely in this direction or checked in that.

In the summer she spent months with him in the open fields, the woods, among the mountains, until her expanding mind was stored with the wealth it craved. Strong of limb and light of foot she grew, and could follow him anywhere. The grace her mother had sought for her in the heated room, and from painful because disagreeable attitudes, she found in larger measure on the mountain-sides. Air and exercise in plenty had rounded the cheek and painted it with a brilliant and enduring bloom.

CHAPTER II.

THE OLD HOME.

ONLY a week to Christmas, and the old Brainard mansion at Stanton Falls was lively with the hum and stir of preparation. Not a snowflake had fallen. The autumn had been golden and perfect from radiant earth to sun-bright sky, and the winter thus far generously mild and pleasant.

Here Clarissa Brainard lived alone but for the old servant who had spent nearly a lifetime with her and the neighbor's boy who came morning and night for chores.

It had been a busy time in the ancient home. Aunt Clarissa moved briskly from room to room, throwing open the old-fashioned shutters that the sun might stream into every corner with its health-inspiring rays, flicking every speck of dust from the carved wainscotting, laying out the lavender-scented linen to warm and air for each guest-room. The old fireplaces were piled with wood ready for kindling, the brightly burnished andirons waiting to reflect the ruddy flames. Every bin in the cellar was full to overflowing with fruit and vegetables; pickles, pre-

serves, and jars of sweetmeats had been long prepared; while in the garret stores of butternuts and shagbarks waited only for young hands to crack them. Now Miss Brainard was consulting her factotum in regard to the immediate needs of the table.

The kitchen was a long, bright room, with windows opening on three sides; two outside doors: one—its upper part of glass with a muslin curtain partly drawn across it—opened upon a broad porch covered with a leafless grapevine, whose twisted trunk and branches closely interlaced cast a flickering shade upon the well-scoured floor within. The other door led to the woodshed. Others pointed to the body of the house, the large pantry, and the cellar.

It was a room for comfort as well as work. An old-fashioned settle invited rest in one corner. An easy-chair and a small stand near by told that mistress and maid sometimes worked together. The brick oven had been heated and filled with loves of bread and cake. The hot stove had helped to make the long room too warm for comfort, and Becky had opened the window looking into the garden. She stood with her back towards it at a table, rolling pastry into various forms and filling sheets and pans for the oven.

A tall gaunt form, whereon hung a black

skirt covered with a long white apron; sleeves rolled up discovered sharp elbows and strong sinews well accustomed to toil. The clock on the mantel ticked melodiously; the cat on the hearth purred contentedly. It was a peaceful, pleasant scene, appreciated by a pair of half-frightened, half-mischievous dark eyes peering through the open window.

A slight, half-clothed girl, with tangled hair, soiled hood, and ragged shawl, stood on tip-toe without—a pitiful little figure, who seemed to enjoy in fear and trembling the warmth and fragrance that met her eager, hungry face. How she listened to the voices and wondered at the lavish display, almost smacking her lips with desire!

"Plenty of small cakes, Becky. The children never tire of eating. Bring me that platter; I 'll beat the whites for your frosting."

As Becky turned to obey, the frowsy head disappeared.

"Let me see," said Becky; "four pans of puffs, four of cranberry-tarts, plenty of cookies and crullers; then the fruit and white cake all ready, with each one's loaf ready frosted and sugar-plums atop. The table 'll look fine to my eye. The pullets are fat as butter. Sam is faithful as any boy can be. Whew! I must stop talking. A little too brown, but the frost

will set that right, and children a'n't apt to be over fussy, bless them! Wont they upset the whole house and turn things topsy-turvy! Five this year, miss."

"Yes, Becky. I can hardly wait to see the baby, the dear fellow with his two rollicking boys, the dear mother, and that little stranger. I am as impatient as a child, Becky."

"No wonder, miss; I could n't wait myself if it were n't for getting ready. Tut-tut! puffs will spoil. Ah that 's a fair bake, see!"

"Yes, just a lovely brown."

Taking them from the oven, Becky slid the pan along the table. Then seeing the shadow of a head moving as she turned, she exclaimed,

"Who 's there? Why, Mag, you idle good-for-nothing, what are you prowling round here again for? You ought to be at work. Here, you 've no call to run. Take a cake, child. Then go home and go to work. All the time racing the streets. What 'd you come here for anyway?"

"Smelt good!" grasping the cakes and biting voraciously.

"Did, hey? Well, you 'll never fatten on smells. Now start."

"No, no, Becky! Give her more; I believe she 's hungry."

"Well, take this; and this is a little dark.

Now off with you. After Christmas you can have what 's left. Start!"

Mrs. Hamlin was Clarissa Brainard's younger sister, and with her brother's family, whose home was in a Western city, was anticipating a reunion within the walls of their early home where the elder sister still kept up the customs and style of a past generation.

Christmas eve found them all together, rehearsing the experiences of the year, rejoicing in the annual home-coming with the five children: Clare, named for her aunt and very dear to her; Dot, a general favorite; Ned, a year older than Clare; and Harry, younger than Dot. Uncle Eric was of the number; no family gathering could be complete without him; while the baby sister was the plaything of each and all.

One room was mysteriously locked and not to be opened till Christmas evening; apart from that the whole house was ablaze with light and glowing with the warmth of fires in each room. Doors stood open from kitchen to parlor, and the boys and girls were everywhere.

Just now Harry was playing with his little sister, and Ned was listening to an exciting conversation between the brothers, when Dot ran in from another room and drawing Clare away, whispered,

"I 've seen her again, Clare. She 's been

hanging round here the last half-hour, and every time any one comes in sight she slips behind the well or back of the ash-barrel. She looks awful cold and hungry; her toes all stick out, bare as can be."

"Perhaps she's trying to steal. Let's go scare her away." Clare's city vigilance had taught her to be suspicious.

"Well, let's. Becky's awful careless; she leaves all the doors wide open and unlocked, and she, way up stairs making the fires burn. Anybody might steal just as easy, you know."

"So they might. P'r'aps she's a gypsy." Clare had been reading of these vagrants.

"Oh my! I believe she is. Let's catch her. She's as little as I am. There! just peek out; she's looking over the barrel; see her?"

"Yes, the moon makes her face awful white. I'll tell you, Dot, I'm the strongest; I'll go one side and you the other. We'll catch her and make her tell our fortunes."

"Oh that'll be splendid! We'll make auntie have her tell all our fortunes."

"Now be ready. I see her hood. You just run when I do, and don't speak a word till we get hold of her."

Swinging open the porch door, they made a sudden rush, one on each side the barrel, and seized together the frightened stranger.

"We 've caught you!" exclaimed Clare.

"Yes, we 've caught you!" echoed Dot.

"Le' me 'lone! I say, le' me 'lone!" gasped the startled child, struggling to free herself from the firm, healthy, grasping hands of the two. "O-o-o-h, le' me go! You *shall!*"

"No, you can't go. Come into the kitchen. You must tell our fortunes," answered Clare, pulling her towards the house despite her desperate resistance.

"Don't, oh don't; she 'll beat me. Le' me go! I 'll never come again. Oh, oh, le' me go, I say. I 'll *bite* you!" turning ferociously upon Clare.

"No you wont. Push her in, Dot. There! Now tell us who you are and we 'll let you go;" as with an energetic shove they moved her with quick impetus into the middle of the warm kitchen and shut and locked the door.

She turned towards them with a strange mixture of fear and defiance in her black eyes, and stood rigid as a statue, her lips pressed together, her hood hanging from her neck, and the matted hair flung in stray unkempt locks about the dark brow and swarthy cheek.

"She *is* a gypsy," whispered Dot mysteriously, while Clare, half repenting her part in the performance, asked gently,

"Are you a gypsy?"

"A what?" was the scowling interrogatory.

"A gypsy—don't you know? They tell fortunes."

"No, I dunno. I a'n't nothing. I hate you both, I do, with your nice clo'es. Le' me go, or I 'll holler an' tell the woman. I 'll scream, I will."

"What woman? Becky?"

"Yes, I will. There—now—I 'm goin' to."

"Did you want to steal?" asked Dot sweetly.

The girl grew frightened and humble.

"No, not here; truly I did n't. Oh please le' me out. I promised not to stay long."

"Promised who?"

"Ole Sal."

"Tell us what you came for yesterday and to-night; then we 'll let you go."

"I only wanted to see how happy you was. It looked warm and good. That 's all I came here for. I never steals from *her;* she gives me cakes sometimes. Now may I go?"

"Where do you live? Who takes care of you? What is your name?" asked Clare.

"I lives with the ole woman, drunken Sal, that 's where I lives. I takes care o' myself."

"What 's your name?"

"Mag. Now may I go?" She was getting over her fright.

"Don't go yet, Maggie. We 're your

friends. We only wanted to have some fun with you."

The forlorn creature looked as though she thought the fun was all on one side.

"Yes, we 're your friends, Maggie; it 's only fun," echoed Dot.

"Wont you tell on me?"

"No indeed, of course not, if you do n't steal. Are you cold?"

"I do n't know; guess not."

"Hungry?"

Oh what pleading depths did the hungry eyes disclose; how the eager lips, so thin and famished, quivered out the answer, "I 'm always hungry."

"Oh, poor thing!" exclaimed Clare piteously.

"Oh!" repeated Dot in the same tone.

"I 'll give you something to eat. Aunt Clarissa says we are to get all we want from the pantry, every one of us, so as not to keep her running all the time. Wont you run away if I get you something good?"

"No." The wild eyes glistened with hope.

Dot still guarded the door and watched the strange figure standing before her, while Clare soon emerged from the pantry with hands full of cookies and a large mince turnover, which the girl grasped eagerly, biting into it at once.

For a few moments they watched her quietly, wondering how it would feel to be so hungry; then Clare went again and brought her a tumbler of milk, which she drank off without pausing for breath.

"Good?" asked Clare.

A nod of the shaggy head was the only reply.

"Is drunken Sal your mother?"

"No, I guess not."

"Where is your mother?"

"Dunno. Have n't any."

"What makes you steal?" real sympathy speaking from Clare's blue eyes.

"*She* makes me—ole Sal."

"I would n't steal for her!" exclaimed Dot indignantly.

"She 'd kill you if you did n't."

"Would she kill you?" Dot grew pale.

"Yes, she has a good many times, most."

"She ought to be hung! She 's awful. What do you live with her for, if she is n't your mother?"

"Dunno where else to live; nobody 'll have me."

"It 's too bad. I 'd have you if I was a woman, and teach you to be good and give you lots to eat, and presents too—Christmas presents. Did you ever have any?" asked Clare.

"No, never."

"Never see a Christmas-tree all full of 'em?"

"No," gulping down the last of the cookies.

"But that's perfectly awful, Clare, never to see a Christmas-tree! Ever hang up your stocking?"

"Of course not, Dot; don't you see they would n't hold anything—all holes!"

"O Clare, let's surprise 'em all. Let's have her come to the tree to-morrow. There's one in that locked-up room, I know. We'll have her come to it."

Dot danced across the floor.

"She a'n't fit," responded Clare.

They looked thoughtful a moment; then brightening, Clare said,

"We might put on one of your dresses. She is as big as you. Will you come?" turning to the girl, who was intently listening.

"Wont the woman be mad?"

"Auntie? Pooh, no! We make her do just as we want her to, have many a time. You come, and we'll dress you all up lovely and show you elegant things. Will you?"

"Yes, if you'll take the blame. She sha' n't beat me."

"No, I guess not!" Dot tossed her proud little head very decidedly.

"Only you must wash clean; be sure now, all over, or I can't put Dot's dress on you."

The child nodded and grinned, saying,

"Are you true now? No game?"

"Truly! We'll take care of you and give you lots of goodies to eat. You'll come?"

"Yes. When?" her eyes fairly glittering.

"After dinner. Mamma and auntie will be taking a nap, the boys'll be out of the way. We'll be looking out the front-door and take you right up to our room, and nobody'll know you. Oh wont it be fun!"

"Splendid! She'll have a good time for once, wont she, Clare?"

"And plenty to eat."

"And all clean, too," laughed Dot.

"Now go quick, so Becky wont see you."

"Be sure and wash you all over," was the parting injunction as they hurried her into the yard and away. Then with gurgles of low laughter they scampered back to where the family were still interested in reminiscences of the past.

Becky's Christmas dinner was a surprise to herself, and the children's praise was unbounded. Becky's gratification was at its height. The two mothers helped to clear everything away before they took their afternoon rest, and by four o'clock the house was still as at night. The

boys went down the village street to hunt up old friends, and the two girls were left to amuse themselves, Aunt Clarissa bidding them have their gifts ready to hang on the tree by five o'clock.

"Then it *is* a tree, auntie?" said Clare.

"Who said it was a tree, Petkin?"

"Why you just said so yourself."

"Well, who 'd have thought I 'd let the cat out of the bag! But keep the secret, girls; don't say a word to the boys."

"No, we surely wont," delighted.

At night the boys came with shouts and laughter. Baby woke, and Harry, who was his mother's boy, took the wee thing and cared tenderly for it. Numberless raps on the girls' door were unheeded. "We must not be disturbed till evening," shouted Dot.

"Let them alone. Their secrets are as precious as ours," said Aunt Clarissa, and the pair were undisturbed from that time.

Two hours before they had peered from a window until the ragged hood came in sight; slipping out they hustled the strange child up to their room and began operations. Dot's dresses were looked over; a plain scarlet merino chosen as best suited, Clare said, to the black eyes and dark hair of the girl. But that hair! What could they do with it — a tangled, frowzy

mass. No common-sized comb could force its way through such a labyrinth. The trio stood perplexed. Maggie bore the remarks, the pulling and breaking, with great patience. Indeed the pain of the process was more than counteracted by the pleasing sensation of being dressed in something besides rags.

At last in despair they were obliged to say it could not be done—never would come decent. She could n't have the dress on with such a head anyway.

Maggie's disappointment was dreadful to bear. Tears started—tears that would not have shown themselves had every hair been pulled out, so pleased was this waif at the strange turn of affairs. Must her delight be nipped in the bud? Must she look at that lovely dress and not put it on? Black stockings and whole boots on her half-frozen feet, only to come off so soon? Wash herself all over for nothing? Not if she knew it. Quick at expedients, she glanced from one sister to the other, then grasping from the table a pair of scissors, gave them to Clare, saying,

"Cut it off."

"Your hair?"

"Yes, every bit."

"Wont old Sal whip you?"

"I do n't care; cut it off."

That was an easier matter. Dot held a towel while Clare played barber and used the shears courageously. It was not artistically done, perhaps, but no sooner was the tangled mass lying in the towel than the wild girl impetuously grasped a comb and tore it with worthy determination through the little that remained on her shorn head.

Soon, the dress on, a dainty white apron over it, a tiny ruffle in the neck, and she stood before them a lovely picture of their perseverance, courage, and charity.

Maggie gazed at them and they at her. She laughed in their faces, smoothed the soft folds of the frock, looked admiringly in the glass at her unusual reflection, and laughed again with a ripple of real gladness which they echoed right heartily.

"Does n't she look sweet, Clare?"

"Yes, Dot, so clean and nice."

"Now she belongs to us two, does n't she?"

"Yes, but only for to-night."

"I wish we could keep her always."

"So do I, Dot."

They turned to their presents, whispered long and earnestly over two packages.

"If she belongs to us, she ought to have a present." They finally concluded to give to Maggie the gift each had prepared for the other.

"We have plenty, Dot, and we know we love each other; she wont know we love her unless we give her something."

"Yes, you mark them over."

While Clare was writing Maggie's name on the two packages, Dot turned to the bewildered child.

"You wont ever steal again?"

"No, indeed," with a toss of scorn at her former pursuits.

"'Cause you can't be a lady if you steal, and you can't belong to us. We can't love you, you know."

"I know," with a nod of satisfaction.

"I hope you will be good enough to have Jesus love you," added Clare, with a heavy sigh, as the responsibility of work in evangelizing this little sinner flashed across her young mind.

"I don't want anybody else to love me."

"Oh don't say that. If Jesus does n't love you, we can't either."

"Can't? Well he may then. I don't care."

"Why, Maggie, don't you know about him?"

"I 've heard of him. Never seen him though."

"We have n't seen him, but we love him. He is our best friend."

"Oh-h-h!"

Aunt Clarissa called,

"Come, girls; we are ready."

"Coming, auntie." They took Maggie between them. She was in a tremor of doubt and undefined fear.

The procession was moving towards the closed room. Aunt Clarissa was systematic always; with key in hand she led the way, the eager boys close behind, Uncle Eric, with the crowing, white-robed baby held high, the two mothers, Becky smiling broadly, and the girls bringing up the rear. In the confusion Maggie was unnoticed.

A blaze of light met them, and the tree, loaded with gifts, glittered and quivered and welcomed them as though it lived and spoke.

To Maggie it was unreal and wonderful, a bright picture of fairyland. Holding tightly to Clare's hand, she gazed in silence until Uncle Eric, giving up the baby, began the distribution. How delightful it was! Every hand held something of value to its recipient.

"Something for Maggie. Who is Maggie?"

"It must be Becky, Eric."

"Here she is, auntie. I invited her; I thought you would n't care."

"Bless you, dear, no, indeed. That 's your secret, is it? Well, Miss Maggie, whoever you may be, you will like this."

Mrs. Hamlin watched the girls after this;

she recognized the box as Clare's intended gift to Dot. Some mystery to solve, she thought.

Maggie took it like one in a maze. Soon her name was read again. This time a book.

"Dot's book," said the mother to herself.

"Clare, who is your little friend? I've seen that face before, haven't I?" asked Aunt Clarissa.

"You may!" said Becky from the doorway.

"I don't know her other name. Don't make her afraid, auntie."

"Certainly not. What put that in your head, chick? Where do you live, dear?" addressing the startled Maggie.

"I'm Mag, marm. I lives with ole Sal."

"Oho-ho-ho! Why, Clare, what does this mean?"

"I didn't go to come. They said you should not put the blame on *me*," answered Maggie with spirit.

"Auntie, I'll tell you all about it." Clare had caught Uncle Eric's gaze. "She isn't a bit to blame. Dot and I got her here just for fun. She was awful hungry."

"And dirty," broke in Dot.

"Always is," from the grim Becky.

"And I gave her something to eat. Dot and I went without our cookies all the next day. She never saw a Christmas-tree or had any fun,

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and we got her up to our room and dressed her—and—and—"

"She washed herself clean all over, truly." Dot had caught her mother's eyes resting on the merino dress.

"She's clean as anybody. We cut off her hair and gave her our presents. She never steals here, auntie, and I think she ought to have *one* good time in her life, I do." The words came from Clare with strange impetuosity, and fairly overcome she burst into tears.

Uncle Eric bit his lip to hide a smile.

"So she had, dear. It's all right. I'm glad she's here; don't cry. It's all very nice. She has Dot's dress on, hasn't she?" Aunt Clarissa's tones were soothing.

"Yes. Clare said it matched her looks best, and she is perfectly clean, mamma."

"I said it was most becoming to her style," interrupted Clare, wiping her eyes.

"So it is, Clare. Your taste is always capital," whispered Ned. Harry gave a blast on his trumpet and the baby howled gleefully.

Curious glances were directed towards the stranger. She bore them unflinchingly; she did not feel herself responsible for being there, and she trusted her brave young protectors.

"Clare! You! Be these things to keep? Ole Sall 'll sell 'em for rum."

"Of course they are to keep. She sha'n't sell them."

"But she will. I don't mind the beating; but if she sells these—." The idea was too painful. Maggie's eyes filled.

"Mamma! It's dreadful! She says that woman will sell her things. She isn't her mother, and she makes her steal."

"She's awful to her," added Dot.

"It is a hard case," from Aunt Clarissa.

"Why don't your selectmen look into it?"

"Clarissa, why don't you keep her here? You have room and time and heart too."

"Yes, auntie. Oh if you would!" from Clare.

"She's smart enough to be of use, and may prove a blessing," and the mother of the boys hugged the lovely baby tightly.

Aunt Clarissa looked bewildered until Clare wound an arm about her neck.

"O auntie, I shall love you for ever if you do."

"*You* are my child, Clare. Can I have two?"

"We are all yours," from Ned, who pitied the little beggar, listening with wide eyes turning from one to another.

"Maggie, would you be a good girl if you could stay with me?" Aunt Clarissa tried to look sternly at her, but the girl saw beneath the mask.

"I 'll do all you say. I will try." The voice trembled and the whole slight form quivered with hope and fear.

"Well, child, stay to-night; in the morning I 'll see."

"What do *you* say, Becky?"

"She might learn to wash dishes." The one thing in Becky's domain that was burdensome to her.

The children hugged their auntie until she was fain to beg a truce.

The next morning Maggie appeared in a frock of Clare's. Their mother had laid aside the garments she was willing they should be generous with, Dot reminding her that it was the same as doing it for Jesus. "'Naked and ye clothed me,' mamma, don't you know?"

There had been a terrible snowstorm in the night; streets and door-ways were blocked, huge drifts in every conceivable and fantastic shape were to be seen everywhere. Within the great house warmth and happiness abounded.

"Must she go, auntie?"

"Will you have me, marm?" asked Maggie.

"You can't go through this storm, child."

"I 'll work for you! I don't eat much!"

The pleading gaze and beseeching tone were too much for the spinster's composure. Face to face with this bit of suffering, oppressed human-

ity, her whole nature answered the yearning of that homeless heart; putting her hand with a half caress on the black head, she asked,

"Will you obey me, child?"

"Yes, if it kills me."

"Will you call me auntie as the others do?" a smile hiding her emotion.

"Oh yes, ma'am. May I?"

"Yes."

All laughed for joy but the child herself; she was overwhelmed. Dropping on the floor she hid her face in the black gown of her new mistress and sobbed uncontrollably.

Later in the day news flashed through the village that the body of a woman had been found in the snow by the old shanty that Maggie had so long called home, a half-empty jug in her arms. With a look of terror the waif murmured,

"Ole Sal!"

Then Aunt Clarissa took her in her arms.

"Child, God has preserved you. We will praise him."

From that moment Maggie loved Aunt Clarissa with her whole being; and as the same group met year after year this child, whose parentage the Father alone knew, greeted them with ever-increasing grace and culture, until the prophetic words, "She will prove a blessing to you," were verified.

CHAPTER III.

MISS GRAY.

ERIC HAMLIN, the younger by several years, had proved the strength of his brother's affection, and was as much at home in his family as he would have been in his father's house.

The elder brother had prospered in business from the first. Shrewd, upright, with a genial nature and a rare devotion to friends, he possessed true Christian principles that manifested themselves in his daily life, with his business, friends, or at home in the midst of those he best loved. He had urged Eric to make his home with them until he could do better for himself. Almost immediately upon leaving college Eric had been called to fill his present position as principal of the City High School. Mrs. Hamlin gave him the affection of a sister, making for him such a haven of rest and contentment that he desired no other. In return they found him a charming companion, a wise friend and brother, whose daily influence upon the lives of their children was Christlike and uplifting.

The change of school and teacher had proved beneficial to Clare, as her uncle had foreseen.

Even his sister recognized the benefit, though she regretted Clare's tastes could not be directed into other channels.

Dot, the irrepressible, was her own. In physique and temperament like her mother, filling the house with the music of her song or the babbling gayety of her laugh, she went on her glad way as a sparkling brook tumbles and dashes through sunshine and shade on and away.

In the long summer vacations they were still together at the seashore, among the hills, or better still with dear Aunt Clarissa in the old home at Stanton Falls, not a dozen miles from the city. At such times Uncle Eric took a week from his more extended and rougher trips to convince himself that his especial charge was improving her freedom from the conventional restraints of city life, restraints that with all his watchful tact he sometimes failed to control.

Ah those days when all together, over hill and vale, through wooded paths and along the side of winding brooks, they wandered!

Wonderful secrets he read to them from nature's open book, finding a new and mysterious beauty in the commonest things they looked upon, until every weed, to Clare's awakening perceptions, had a charm of its own, every stone to her inquiring mind held treasures, and every bird a varying burst of music. The young High

School principal saw with pride that his favorite was growing into the true life God had meant her to fill. Everything of beauty pointed to a first Source they were beginning to comprehend, to a universal Fatherhood they were sure to reverence, to a brotherhood in Christ that would influence and control their lives.

If the flyaway Dot failed to understand the note that touched her soul and stirred for an instant her dormant nature, Uncle Eric smiled indulgently. The higher life would some time assert itself, he was sure, for God deals not alike with all his children. As their needs are varied, so must his teaching, be. A moment of wondering interest would light up the child's sweet face, the soul would partly reveal itself, then the flash would expire, the pretty butterfly dart off for a sip of her own evanescent sweets.

Bluebirds, martens, wrens sang not more gayly than this gayest bird of them all. The finch, telling of summer, with its clear bell-like note, brought to the child all the depth of joy she seemed capable of; she echoed his bright carol, his loud warble, and trilling notes as long as they were glad, but before the air died away in its touching plaintive melody it was forgotten.

Day after day they tramped the woods and meadow paths in quest of treasures, and never

was there a more delightful companion than Uncle Eric. Only for a week. His life of work called for more rugged sports than Clare could endure.

He was satisfied to see that she started out fairly under her mother's guidance, with a little impetus from him for the first few days. Then they separated for the two long summer months, to meet at their close refreshed and ready for work.

Year by year this manner of life went on, until Clare's method of study grew into a pleasant and simple system, developing health and vigor of mind and body.

Uncle Eric gave her a morning and evening hour—rare hours to both. Her little room adjoined his more spacious study. In it was her case of books which he had selected—few but choice, suited to her years; one or two perhaps a little beyond her capacity, a bait to lure her on. Near by stood another case of specimens gathered in the holiday trips.

The desk, her father's gift, a few bright pictures, a bird in the window, a vase of flowers, and besides her own study-chair easy seats for mother or sister when they called.

It was evident the master was bent on leading her into his own beloved field of thought and research, but her steps were slow and careful.

He guarded her from every danger, thoughtless indulgence, or imprudent overtaxing. Sometimes Dot's laughing face appeared for but "a sniff of literary air;" it stifled her, she said. Love, fun, and song filled her life to its horizon, and the parents found their home no less delightful that the girls differed so entirely.

This home education continued until Clare was ready at fifteen to enter the High School. She shrank from this change to an unaccustomed life. She had learned to love her freedom to be able to drop pen or book as the spirit moved, passing from one pleasant employment to another, never idle, never pressed or weary. It had been, thus far, an ideal school-life. What would the new life bring to her with its crowd of gay young people, its press of student work, its little rivalries and heart-burnings unknown to her thus far, its routine, push, and hurry, all so different from the last five years? Would Uncle Eric be the same? Could she carry with her into the world the precious principle of her daily living—her love to Christ—in and through all the unknown duties that would meet her? Would the same Saviour share the trials and difficulties of the new life, and give her the daily help that of late had been so needful to her growing faith? Her heart almost failed her at the thought. Was she not like a soldier going

into battle for the first time? Must she go alone? Oh no, her strength was indeed weakness, and with the same gentle faith that had met and conquered her fears of long ago she turned the key of her door, shutting out all but Christ, and with a childlike trust knelt and asked the help that never is denied. From that moment her doubts vanished. She knew in whom she trusted.

She found herself placed in Miss Gray's division when the day came and the new school life began. Miss Gray was the new teacher of the High School, and about her hung a mystery that her co-laborers and pupils failed to understand by dint of watching or questioning. Too reserved to be a favorite, silent and undemonstrative as a statue, slight, graceful, self-possessed and quiet, systematic in fulfilling duty, with penetration to discern when her pupils failed from lack of effort or from want of power, and able to rouse to new energy in the one case, and to assist and encourage in the other. She succeeded as a teacher in arousing ambition and commanding respect, yet at the close of the term she was as much a stranger as at the beginning.

Once she had apparently forgotten herself. Unconsciously drawn into an argument regarding discipline of the younger classes, she crowded into a few sentences her sentiments. Her eyes lighted and revealed new depths, her tones

trembled with feeling that took her listeners by surprise. It passed like a flash; in a moment the light was out, the face still and beautiful as ever, emotionless as marble.

Mr. Hamlin was curious. Those few words evinced elevation of thought and wealth of affection.

"Who is she?" was asked over and over. "Where did you find her?"

"We do not know. We did not find her. Our former teacher was suddenly removed by illness; the term had just begun. We were in trouble, desirable teachers all engaged. After an advertisement Miss Gray called upon me, was questioned, examined, and engaged at once. I have had no cause to regret the haste. But I don't understand her."

"Where does she live?"

"No one knows."

"Has she friends?"

"We're quite in the dark regarding her friends. We only know her to be a first-class teacher. Her pupils obey her. Even Jack Ellis, rusticated twice a year for his pranks, is a gentleman now, at least in the schoolroom. I watched the subduing of that rebellious spirit from the very beginning of the outbreak, heard her issue in clear, low tones a command, not to him alone, but to the whole class; her gaze never left his

face; mild but resolute, kind but firm and unyielding, she looked him into submission. The blood mounted to his forehead, his eyes, twinkling with mischief, grew serious as she held his gaze, and the saucy mouth quivered with his desire to resist, but all of no avail. I was amused and interested; I saw she was equal to him and needed no help from me. Some time after she asked him for a book. As he stood a moment by her desk, she took his hand in hers an instant, looked up into his eyes, and said a few words in a low tone; her face was as still as ever, but his worked like that of a grieved child; the great impulsive fellow was entirely subdued."

"And remains so?" asked the friend.

"To all appearances; but I believe it can't last. I have little faith in Jack. He is smart as steel, will graduate next year. His father's a valued friend, and Jack the only boy."

After this conversation, which took place in the private room of the principal, the school was closed for the short spring vacation.

Miss Gray disappeared and was not seen again until the opening of the next term, when at the hour appointed she was behind her desk, white and statuesque as ever, courteous and reserved in her greeting to the other teachers, her dress black and plain, with a narrow white frill at neck and wrists, giving a youthful ap-

pearance, her hair braided and wound on the back of her small, shapely head.

Only Jack ventured to evince real pleasure at seeing her again. Like the burly, impulsive fellow he was, he stamped along between the rows of desks, his cheeks glowing with health, his eyes sparkling with good-nature, and a broad laugh spreading over his whole face. Dropping the strap of books, he proceeded quickly to Miss Gray's desk and frankly offered her his hand, saying,

"I did n't know you were coming back. I 'm glad you have; it 's jolly." Then, blushing like a girl at his freedom, he would not have waited for the response had she not held his hand and smiled back into his honest face.

It was a rare smile she gave him. It thrilled him to the heart, boy as he was. It was like a burst of sunshine over a winter landscape, deluging with warmth and brilliancy the coldness and gloom before apparent.

Jack beamed all over his ruddy face as he took his seat, with a new ambition to be worthy of her friendship if he could.

Mr. Hamlin noticed the interview; his interest in his new teacher increased; he thought, "She has a heart, cover it as she may." From this time his respect showed itself in many ways that Miss Gray could not fail to understand.

oblivious as she might appear. She felt that he was observing her, and that she was an object of suspicion to the other teachers; but day by day she carried herself with the same straightforward, indifferent air, speaking always in calm, clear tones, distinctly heard by all the class, giving to each pupil the same attention, showing special favor to none, unless Jack's morning smile might be called such.

The school building was the finest in the city and had the name of being the most aristocratic; whether any better brain-work was accomplished there than in less favored localities was a mooted question. There was a certain air of comfort, not to say style and elegance, among the children that betokened wealth in the homes more generally than among those of other schools; and when one bright morning of the first week of the term a new pupil appeared in the person of a small girl, who by reason of her quick wit and ready ability was placed in Miss Gray's classes, where she proved to be the youngest, there was a general elevation of noses and shrugging of shoulders, for Barbara Allen was poorly clad. Not that she was untidy in any respect or that her garments were not suited to the time of year. Very neat and prim she looked in her clean, dark, old-fashioned print dress, with a home-made sun-bonnet of the same material

hiding her mass of brown hair that clung in rings to a well-shaped head, a little check shawl over her shoulders, a bit of white muslin basted in the neck of her dress, but not another ray of brightness about her, unless the great brown eyes could be called so, as they danced with delight at this new experience. Her small hands were red with toil, but far from misshapen or ungraceful, as more than one scornful maiden noticed when she hung her unique garments beside their more elegant ones.

"Poor child," thought Miss Gray, "how happy she looks in her unconsciousness."

And how the pretty trembling lips tried to smile into the faces near her, scarcely noticing there was no response. Her heart fluttered with joy that she could again be in school; so much better, she thought, than to study alone, as she had been doing the past few years, even though her teacher had been the dear, patient mother. Her lip quivered at the thought of *mother*, but she put it bravely away, remembering her promise on that last day to be happy for the sake of the lonely toiler who had no one now but his little girl. She drew a long sigh and looked from face to face, seeking friendliness, but finding only disdainful glances that she did not comprehend.

Miss Gray noticed the hostile attitude of her

pupils, and placing Barbara next a gentle-appearing young girl, said,

"Clare, will you show this little stranger the lessons of to-day?"

"Yes, Miss Gray," was the smiling reply, and in a moment the two young heads were bending over one book, and the observing principal caught again the radiant smile of approval that for a moment almost transfigured the young teacher's face. It was a golden day for Clare when she looked into Miss Gray's clear eyes and read there the record of a noble soul. A bond of sympathetic feeling sprang up between them, and from that day she had no cause to regret her uncle. She knew he was watching her progress and she did not mean to fail him. With an earnest purpose she entered upon the new life. Her intercourse with the other pupils had been friendly but not familiar. They were not necessary to her or she to them; but this stranger, so unlike them, so really friendless — Clare's heart went out to her. She could be of use to her; she felt a stirring of responsibility quite new to her. They were friends at once. Barbara's gratitude was unbounded. Her sunny nature gave to the gloomiest spots a reflex light, and she was ready to ignore all that she could not understand.

CHAPTER IV.

MAY FLOWERS.

BARBARA'S father, a carpenter, was at this time very poor. He had been able to make a fairly comfortable home for wife and daughter, and whatever luxuries had been denied, their lives had been rich in love. Barbara's heart had been a fountain of joy from babyhood. She was more like a ray of sunshine than a child of poverty and toil.

She had never known the meaning of sorrow until the last strange, wondering good-by was said to the mother now resting in the quiet cemetery at Stanton Falls—the mother whose years of weakness had never dimmed her smiles or clouded for a moment the lives of the two so dear. She covered her pain with silence. Her words were full of courage and her trust in the tender love of Christ inspired with a hope that almost fitted them for the parting sure to come. How tenderly and faithfully she endeavored to prepare Bab to go on without her! How earnestly in her failing strength she pointed them both to Christ who could be their only strength in time of trouble!

Now in her absence the words came back to them, soothing their anguish, showing to their dim sight that the great sorrow, dark indeed, was but a shadow, hiding for a little time the light that could never be put out, of God's great love to his children.

Out of employment and nearly penniless, Mr. Allen turned to Barbara. Her sunny nature cast its bright rays along the gloomy way. She hardly comprehended this sudden loss. Her mother had said it was God's will that they should dwell apart for a time, and with a child's obedient spirit she tried to still the pain and bear the parting. She looked with awe upon her father's grief. It was terrible to see him weep, and she crept near with a desire to minister to him as her mother would have done.

She laid her hand on his bowed head, patted him gently, and with lips that trembled she whispered,

"Don't, father, please don't. Mother wanted us to be happy. Father dear, don't."

He had forgotten her. His whole frame was shaking with suppressed sobs.

"Father dear, you make me afraid."

The strange, helpless pathos of her voice wakened him. He turned his haggard gaze upon the sweet, pale face. Her eyes had a look of misery he had never seen in them before.

She trembled as one in a chill. Her lips could hardly frame the endearing name. "Father—"

Then he took her in his arms, rested his head against her, and cried,

"Bab, we are alone! We shall never have her again! Oh, my Barbara!"

"No, no, father, we are not alone. She said we should always have Jesus with us. We can not be alone, father dear."

He groaned in spirit and prayed God for the faith of a little child. He felt himself bereft of a presence whose courage had always outweighed her endurance, whose faith in him and love for him had been the great impelling influence of his life.

Morning brought to Barbara the familiar duties that served in a measure to cover her loneliness. It was a relief to take them up. She glanced with a strange yearning fondness towards the vacant lounge in the warm corner, the little stand with the well-thumbed Bible and books still there. She began to understand what this feeling at her heart meant. True, the mother had smiled when she spoke of parting, had said it was the Father's will, and Barbara had never before known that God's will sometimes meant suffering. She had just remembered her mother reading, "Whom the Lord

loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." It softened the blow to remember that God loved them. She was glad that her father was His son, but it pained her that he must be scourged so bitterly.

It was cold, cheerless, nearly dark; he would soon come home. She would brighten up the room for him. She fluttered busily about and soon had the kettle humming gayly, the cloth laid, and the lamp brightly burning to welcome him, a softened smile of greeting beaming from her loving eyes. That evening he said,

"Barbara, our money is about gone."

"But you can earn more, father?"

"Not here. There 's no work to be had. Nothing."

"Then, father, let us go where there is work."

"Go where? There 's no building short of the city."

He mused despondingly.

"Why can't we go to the city. You are strong. You will find work and I can take care of you."

He looked up, dazed. Her voice, so like the mother's, thrilled him. Brave little soul! She would inspire a rock with hope. Was he indeed casting his burden upon her slight shoulders? That must not be. He was ashamed.

He would gather himself together, hide his grief, and live and labor for this brave child.

In a few weeks his modest possessions were turned into money, enough reserved to make two rooms comfortable. These were found in an old house near the city, out on the hill, beyond the elegant homes and fine buildings within one of which Barbara was to take her place among Miss Gray's more cultured pupils. Here Mr. Allen hoped to find work as a builder. The city was growing fast in this direction and there must be a demand for experienced workers.

The rooms were made homelike. Barbara fell naturally into her mother's ways that were sure to cheer the home-coming of the bread-winner. And now that she had no other care she must begin again her school-life. The Hill School being near, she naturally drifted into that.

It was perfectly plain to the father with his republican tendencies, and to Barbara with her simple nature. But the dainty maidens, who with cultivated eyes and fastidious tastes took in every item of the poor girl's belongings, were not ready with a welcome, would not respond to her timid, inquiring glances and shy, yearning smiles. That she was smart was of little consequence. What earthly right had such a

beggarly-looking girl to indulge in books? The idea of her venturing to reply to questions that were a test for the best scholar among them!

And there was Clare Hamlin, with her dainty ways and refined tastes, sitting so close beside her that their heads touched. It was insulting in Miss Gray to ask it and very weak in Clare to comply. Even Miss Gray could not induce them to step down to a level with any such. The Hill School would be disgraced if they allowed the dregs of the city to come within its honored walls; and to walk right by them all, as Barbara soon did, taking and maintaining a position at the head of her classes—it roused the bitterest and most antagonistic sentiments.

"The idea of that scallawag, with not a cent to her name, coming here to school!" snarled Nellie Miller, whese idea of money value was ability to buy all the confection she craved for herself and her mates.

"And in that rig! Did you ever see anything like it?" came from Edith Atherton, an only child of luxury.

"She 's fairly threadbare and does n't know it. I move we call her attention to it," added another.

"Good! We 'll dub her Miss Threadbare, and teach her her place. To think of her almost taking the words from your mouth, Clare, and

looking so innocent. She's a regular snake in the grass. Another moment you could have answered—Miss Gray had scarcely looked at her. I wonder where she learned it all, so glibly rattled off?"

"But I could n't answer, girls. Miss Gray knew it. I think she's a bright little thing, and seems so happy. We must not let her be disturbed; we must not forget that she is a stranger."

"Stranger! What of that? She's awful mean to disturb us; but of course we can't associate with her."

"Why not?" asked Clare, a touch of indignation in her low voice.

"Why, Clare Hamlin, how perfectly ridiculous you are! Do you think you're going to transform the world with your notions? You dear little puritan! Even your uncle would not think of your hob-nobbing with a ragmuffin, though, as mamma says, 'his hobby is to educate the masses.'"

"And this Miss Nobody is as low down as any."

"Have you discovered any depraved tastes in her? Is she rude or coarse?" asked Clare.

"We do n't know anything about her. I should think the sight of her dress was enough," sneered Nellie.

"We are not obliged to follow her style of dress, though it is whole and clean," responded the undaunted Clare.

"And such hands! Red as beef."

"Not so white as ours, to be sure;" Clare looked at her own slender hands; "but such a pretty shape, girls, and so graceful."

"Well, she's as poor as Job's cat, anyhow, and her father nothing but a carpenter. They keep house in two rooms too; I heard her tell Miss Gray so myself," blurted the angry Nellie.

"No harm in that, Nellie, surely. The dear Lord was a carpenter, and had not where to lay his head. Oh, girls, if we turn our backs upon her it will seem like treating Him with shame. *I* cannot do it."

Not another word was said. It was not the first time Clare had silenced them in this way. They were compelled to respect her fearless Christian character, the broad, generous, Christlike ground she maintained. They loved her gentle nature, but it was easier to follow Nellie's lead than to attain the purer altitude in which Clare's spirit lived.

It was too much to be expected to associate with a nobody simply because she had crowded herself into their classes, happening to be smart and pretty! They were obliged to admit that even in her strange dress, the rustic manners

and lack of culture, a shy grace and modest loveliness shone forth that must be acknowledged. And this was no place for her. Nellie and Edith determined to crowd her out, make the school too uncomfortable for her.

Barbara was unconscious of the enmity she had aroused. Having been so long her mother's sole companion, her only nurse during the last two years of illness, she had become a faithful student, absorbed in her duties, whether of study or household affairs. Always a willing learner, now, under new influences, she became ambitious and her progress was remarkable. Miss Gray was surprised and delighted. Only the envy of an inferior nature, a heart empty of Christlike love, would have checked her ardor by look or word. Her teacher felt a strong interest in her, responding warmly to the young girl's loving advances and gladly giving her all the helps at her disposal.

This bond between the two was looked upon with disfavor by Nellie and her adherents, increasing the ill-feeling that needed no added wind to fan the flames.

Every morning a bunch of wild-flowers was laid upon Miss Gray's desk. Among the many rare blossoms from the homes of affluence that daily found their way to the lonely teacher's acceptance, Barbara's modest offering held the

place of honor. About the middle of the month she came with cheeks fresh as a wild rose, her calico sun-bonnet flung back, and her hands full of the first arbutus of the season.

Clare flew towards her. "Oh, Barbara! Trailing arbutus! How lovely! Where did you find it?"

"In the woods over the hill, way beyond my home. Have some?" Like the spirit of spring she separated the clusters, offering each girl a liberal bunch of the dainty things.

Nellie, with a shrug, refused them. "I don't care for your flowers; I'll get them myself."

"You can go nearly there in the horse-car; it's a lovely place," said Barbara, sweetly unconscious of the rebuff.

"Girls, I'm going for wild-flowers after school. Who will go?" Nellie asked pointedly.

A chorus of voices agreed, and Barbara said, "I'll show you where they are. I found the rhodora just in the edge of the swamp and the spring-beauty and hepatica and this dear little wind-flower in the woods. Mother used to call it wood-anemone. I can take you right to the spot."

"Do hear her! One would think she had lived in the city all her life and knew everything, and we, are the ignoramuses, it seems," sneered Nellie.

"Nellie! How can you?" exclaimed Clare.

"I don't care! She'll be poking herself in our way all the time if some one doesn't speak. My mother snubs such people; she says there's no other way."

Barbara's cheeks glowed, her brown eyes filled. Clare caught her hand as she turned to go from them.

"Don't go, Barbara. She didn't mean it. *I* want you; come with me. I'll ask Miss Gray to go with us."

"What's the matter with me, Clare?"

"Nothing at all. Nellie's cross and you mustn't mind her. I want to go to the place you spoke of. Let's take some of the flowers to Miss Gray—she loves them so—and ask her to go with us."

"Yes, she loves them; her smile is like the waking up of the spring."

"Barbara, I believe you are a poet."

"Am I? I don't know. I love to jingle, don't you?"

Clare laughed. "I wish I could. Mine is the plainest kind of prose. There's little music in my composition. Uncle Eric could tell you that."

Miss Gray's eyes grew tender and loving as they rested on the girls so eager to give her the bunch of May blossoms.

"And this?" touching a bit of paper wound smoothly round the stems with her name on it. "Is this for me?"

"Just a jingle, dear Miss Gray, for you."

What a glad smile broke over the gloom of her fine face! As the girls locked arms and turned away she read the simple lines with a quiet surprise, for she had associated with this girl the capacity only for absolute toil, either with head or hands. She had not thought there had been time for sentiment in her life of labor, or for dreams.

A perfume beckoned in the wood;
I followed where it led,
And there a dainty May-bud stood,
Pure white, just touched with red.
I thought it blushed to have me look
Into its lovely face,
Turning, I left the fragrant spot
And sought another place;
And there the same sweet clusters grew,
Rich perfume shedding round,
I stooped and picked a bunch for you
Half hidden on the ground.

Miss Gray caught Barbara's shy, happy look as she finished the reading, and gave her a nod of sympathetic approval.

The child's bright nature was quickly appeased; petty shafts of hate or envy rebounded, injuring those who aimed them more than their object.

Many of the class followed Nellie that afternoon in search of flowers. They had no idea where to direct their steps after leaving the car.

Miss Gray hesitated. "Will it take long? I must be at home by dusk."

"I could direct you from the cars, Miss Gray," said Barbara. "It would be quicker, but I always walk."

Clare insisted upon the ride. Jack, hanging about, caught enough to be eager to join them; he saw at a glance that Barbara had not a penny.

"Let me go. I'll foot the bill."

He had seen the cold looks of Nellie and her friends and was ready in his impulsive spirit to do battle for the weak; only, as he said, she was able to hold her own as soon as her eyes were opened to their meaning. Barbara indulged no malice and could not accuse others.

The four, so unlike, yet bent on the same quest, took a car and went to the terminus of the line, when Jack gave up the lead.

"Now, Miss Barbara, you know the way. Show us your treasures."

"Do you see those woods and the hill on the side?" she asked brightly.

"So far? It looks low and damp this side the hill."

"No, Miss Gray, it is not very damp; we can

step on dry places all the way. The flowers are all there waiting for us."

They sped along, Barbara in her quaint attire leading the way. Jack bounded from point to point, his quick eye searching for the first blossom. With a whoop of delight he turned back. "Here they are, Miss Gray, perfect beauties. What are they?" he asked.

"We call them thalictrum; see how white and star-like they are," as she took them from from him and bent over them.

"Mother called it the rue-anemone," said Barbara, looking lovingly upon them.

"Yes. Did your mother teach you, Barbara?"

"Everything but my arithmetic, then I recited to father; but mother knew all about flowers. We loved them so."

"See this nodding little thing, Clare?" Jack was filling his cap with roots and all.

"It is the wood-anemone, cousin to all the buttercups, the virgin's-bower, pasque-flower, and columbine," said Miss Gray.

"Here is the first arbutus, and yonder by the wood are clumps of them just pushing through last year's leaves!" cried Barbara.

"We must get all we can," shouted Jack.

"Yes, indeed," responded Miss Gray, the look of care entirely gone from her face.

"Barbara, you have opened to us a delightful nook in nature's garden; let us fill the lunch-baskets and go back; the sun is low."

Jack tore around like a wild thing, crowding the great bunches he gathered into any basket he happened to be near. The observant Clare whispered to him not to keep Miss Gray waiting.

"Why not?" he asked with his usual don't-care spirit.

"She has some reason for wanting to be at home. She is anxious."

"Then let's make a bee-line for the cars; the sun will be down in half an hour. Ready, Miss Gray?"

"Thank you, Jack."

"Clare's the one. *I* never think." She smiled on them both and called Barbara, who crouched on the ground at a distance, her apron full of every blossom within reach; everything she could lay her eager hands on was dear to this child of nature. As they drew near the waiting car they found it nearly full of the other party. A few young, tender shoots were all they could show, and exclamations greeted the four as they entered the car with their abundant trophies.

"We did not go to the right spot," said

Nellie, somewhat chagrined, for she had counted on a supply for her evening adornment.

"I should think not. I would give your ladyship these were they not for the loveliest friend in the city."

"Pooh! Your mother wont care for them." Nellie threw Jack a bewildering glance, and looked longingly at his bunch of arbutus with a cluster of wood-anemone nodding gracefully all over them.

"Will you take some of mine, Miss Nellie?" Barbara's voice was almost beseeching, as she timidly held both full hands towards the little autocrat. Perhaps the manner, which was grace itself, won her, or her selfish desire for the flowers; be that as it may, she graciously helped herself. Barbara beamed brightly, and before she left them had scattered her blossoms right and left, the only one to go home with empty hands.

"She 's a treasure!" said Miss Gray, following her with approving glances as she ran into the old gray house.

"She 's royal!" exclaimed Jack, "a princess in disguise."

"A very shabby princess," sneered Nellie.

"The poor frock may be all the covering our little friend has. She is noble to wear it so bravely; it cannot hide true merit, Nellie."

"No, Miss Gray," interrupted Jack, who was helping Clare arrange her flowers. "Her funny clothes hardly seem to belong to her, she rises so much above her station. We can't any of us hold a candle to her. Don't you think so, Nell?"

"Let's change the subject. I don't care to think of her," with a toss of the proud head.

"Only of the flowers you robbed her of," muttered Jack, and Nellie had the grace to blush painfully.

Nellie Miller and Edith Atherton had hoped to monopolize the society of Prof. Hamlin's niece, and were chagrined and angry at their failure and at her evident content in the company of this strange waif.

They saw their ill-humor had got the better of wisdom, and more bitter than all, Jack Ellis, their gay comrade and fun-loving follower, had gone over to the enemy—Jack, who had shared their sweets, who had given them many a gay ride in his neat little turnout—Jack had turned his back on them, and was actually studying botany with Clare and "Miss Threadbare."

But Nellie would not retreat; she had declared war against this stranger, and war it should be. Such poverty meant disgrace. It could not be admitted within the charmed circle

where Nellie held sway. The orphanhood of this stranger was nothing to her; she would follow the teachings of her mother and snub such people. Clare and Jack would soon come round when they found how little they gained by such outlandish ideas of duty.

No mirror reflects the mother more truthfully than does her child, and the defects of the one are often exaggerated deformities in the other. Every opportunity to wound a sensitive nature was embraced by the proud girls, until a sharp rebuke from Miss Gray called an angry flush to the face and an impertinent toss of the head in reply. Their jealousy increased as they watched Barbara's elastic step and healthful presence every morning, her hands full of the flowers she knew her teacher had learned to expect—the frail, wild blossoms she could have for the picking. Narcissus and jonquils, clusters of heliotrope or mignonette, great clusters of roses from the conservatories of wealth, often overshadowed Barbara's modest offering; but Miss Gray's rare smile more than repaid the loving child for the early hour she snatched from sleep to gather them.

Clare and her uncle had many a quiet talk as they took their daily walk after school. Naturally the new scholar formed one pleasing topic. "She is so quick and ready," Clare

said, "and has learned so much more by studying at home with her mother, who, poor as she was, must have been an educated woman."

Then the antagonism between Nellie and her party came up. Clare asked the wisest way to smooth the difference, and at the same time spare Barbara's wounded feelings. Her uncle was a wise friend, interested in all that concerned his charge, and immediately began to turn over in his mind some way to establish peace.

"Well, my little girl, we must make a flank movement somehow and bring the enemy to terms. We can't allow Miss Nellie to squeeze any of the honey from Barbara's life. She has too little to lose a drop."

"I think so, Uncle Eric; but I can only be kind to her, and it makes Nellie angry and doesn't help matters a bit."

"No kindness is lost, girlie. Why not bring her home with you some day? Perhaps you can do something for her without harm to her self-respect; and if your mates can get into the spirit of it, it will benefit them also, and Barbara may never know the reason why. See? Set the ball a-going. I can trust you."

Clare smiled up into the kind face; but she had not quite freed her mind, and she never concealed anything from him.

"Her dress is so queer, uncle, and she does n't seem to know it."

"Then it would be cruel to tell her. She has a quaint, picture-like, old-fashioned look to me. I hardly knew what caused it."

"It 's the dress, uncle; but surely she is not the worse for that."

"No. Let her feel that she is giving the class an impulse in their lessons; and help them to return the favor by giving her a knowledge of taste in dress—the best taste, I mean, for the child of a poor man. See?"

"Yes, uncle. I believe we can do it—help each other. Her gifts will be the best though."

"As much the best as mind is more than clothing. I 've no doubt you will solve the problem. Now let 's turn back or we shall lose our hot dinner."

Clare was full of hope and enthusiasm. If she could in any way infuse into Nellie's ignoble spirit a real magnanimity, would it not be worth as much to the school as her success in making Barbara happy? She had longed for a mission—something to do for the Master she had learned to love. Perhaps he had given her this. If so, he would help her to accomplish it. She hoped so, and thought so intently upon it that Dot begged to know what Uncle Eric had been talking about.

Thus it happened a few days later that Barbara went from school with Clare and Jack, instead of taking her solitary way towards home as usual.

"Did you ever see anything like that, girls? The little beggar! I think Clare Hamlin must have low tastes, to be taken in so easily."

"And Jack too, Nell," answered Edith.

"Oh boys have no idea of what is proper; they all run after a new face," said Nellie with disdain.

"Well, we must allow she is as pretty as her wild-flowers," added another.

"Not my style at all. Clare only did that to provoke me. Mamma's going to let me have a lawn-party next week. I've a mind to leave her out, and Jack too."

"Oh don't, Nell. Clare is a sweet girl and only means to do right; perhaps we have been a little hard."

"Not a bit. Mamma says we subject ourselves to all sorts of annoyances if we allow any intimacies with people who are low down; and what could be lower, I'd like to know?"

"Ignorance, intolerance, crime," said a low voice behind them.

They turned towards Miss Gray and Nellie flushed painfully.

"My dear girl, when will you learn that it is

the heart the Master looks upon? and no amount of money, no lofty position, no culture, can alone make it fit for his acceptance. Do not forget his words, 'Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these, ye have done it to Me.' I am sure there is a voice in each of your hearts that, if you listen to it, will drive out the unworthy."

And smiling kindly into their faces she left them.

CHAPTER V.

BARBARA'S VISIT.

It was a charming home that Clare took Barbara into, spacious, elegant, and harmonious. Barbara's brown eyes were round with wonder and delight. She could not absorb it immediately. She had never seen such a home.

Clare led her through the great square hall, with its open doors everywhere, the partly drawn hangings revealing visions of untold beauties — the fireplace and polished chimney ornaments, a few rare old pictures, the floor covered with thick, soft rugs, that surprised her as her feet sank into them. Up the broad staircase, with here and there a stream of colored light pouring through the panes of stained glass and blending with the softer tints of the carpet at her feet, she followed into Clare's own little room.

Oh the pleasantness of it to this child of poverty! the refined air that pervaded it, that seemed to speak to a part of her nature just waking into life; the warmth and glow of its furnishings; the books, with silken hangings partly drawn from before them; the flower-vases full of fragrant beauty; the bird's burst of wel-

coming song; the willow work-stand and basket, with its bit of fine muslin half fashioned into something for Clare to use; the desk for writing with all its useful belongings, as unknown to Barbara as the wealth of the mines. She was speechless. Her admiring gaze could not absorb it all.

"Here we are, Barbara dear. This is my own little nook. Take off your things and we 'll find mamma and Dot."

"O Clare!" exclaimed Barbara.

"What is it, Bab?"

"It is all so lovely!" gasped the young girl.

"It 's homelike to me; I 'm happy here of course," mused the gentle Clare. Then smoothing Barbara's red-brown rings that curled over the broad, low brow, she added,

"Come. They will be looking for us."

Fearless, in her innocence, her total ignorance of what might be expected from her in these unwonted surroundings, she followed Clare and was quietly introduced to the mother. Mrs. Hamlin kissed the fresh young face that looked into hers with the trust of a child, saying,

"So my Clare has a new friend. What shall we do to make the hour a pleasant one to you both?"

"I think, mamma, Barbara would like first to hear Dot play."

"I am sure she would. Where is she?"

"Here I am. Just wait a bit; I was nearly starved. Rachel gave me a whole dish of warm wafers, so I brought them along for the girls to help me. They may give me strength to perform," with a comical grimace of exhaustion.

"Frail little mortal! The day's work has been too much for you." It was Uncle Eric's voice.

"Barbara, we are glad to have you with us," he added. Her heart thrilled tumultuously.

She knew this serious-looking man of wisdom, the master, was Clare's uncle, but had not thought to meet him here in this familiar way. Her timid look of gratitude was response enough. He saw she was overwhelmed with a new experience. He watched her. He saw the pure, unselfish enjoyment. Nothing escaped her. Dot, sparkling, graceful, and buoyant, called Barbara's whole generous soul into her face, a transparent face, reflecting every emotion. She watched the mother moving from room to room. She glanced through the half-drawn portière into the library, marvellously full of books, she thought; and saw the master with his evening paper, sitting where he could command a view of the music room and listen, if he chose, to Dot's measured accompaniment to his reading. Then her eyes rested on Clare's gentle face,

plainer than her sister's, but very sweet to loving eyes.

At last, as she finished her survey of the rooms leading from the hall, she became absorbed in Dot's performance; she gazed in amazement on the flying fingers, so like two pure white, fluttering birds. She must have seen hands move over a key-board before, Mr. Hamlin thought.

He furtively glanced over his paper. He was in the habit of studying human nature and this was a unique subject. She drew a little nearer the instrument, her eager head bent forward, one tiny foot in a coarse, thick shoe advanced; her attitude, graceful as her own little anemone bending and swaying on its stalk, called a smile to his face. He caught his sister's eye and pointed to the picture.

Barbara, every faculty engrossed in the sight of Dot's swift fingers, lifting her little red hands seemed to study them anxiously a moment, unconsciously moving them as though playing; then dropping them, with a soft sigh and hopeless air, she gazed with all her soul in her face upon the player.

Clare had seen the pathetic struggle; she understood it. A flush of sympathy went through her. Had she not, in the past, many times compared herself with Dot? Her arm crept round

Barbara, and the child's eyes full of tears looked into hers.

Mrs. Hamlin turned to her brother with emotion.

"Eric, she is charming. Poor child!"

"A rare gem. We must help Clare to polish it."

Then and there Mrs. Hamlin determined to help this motherless girl to fill the niche God must have intended her for, wherever it might be, and whatever obstacles must be surmounted to accomplish it.

They soon drew her willing feet into the conservatory. Here she was more at home; flowers were not strangers. These to be sure were unlike the children of the wood, field, and swamp she knew so well. Still there was here and there a family likeness that gave her a home feeling among them.

After the flowers the three scampered to the top of the house, where a large room finished in ash, with many windows throwing light into every corner, and furnished with every appliance for exercise or amusement, was their playground when the weather forbade out-of-door recreation. A half-hour here of fun as varied as Dot could make it prepared them for the dinner.

"Papa, this is Barbara," said Clare, leading

her to him before seating themselves in the dining-room.

"Barbara is welcome," he responded heartily.

She bowed in a pretty, timid way, and sat beside Mrs. Hamlin, with Clare on her right and Dot opposite.

Everything was strange and wonderful to her. What she was eating Barbara hardly knew. The ripple of conversation, the jest, the lively repartee, the happy laugh that followed Dot's nonsense, the mother's kind solicitude, the conversation of the brothers, the quiet attentions of the waiter, the strange dishes, the silver, the sparkling crystal, the whole luxurious abundance, met Barbara's imaginative nature as the thousand tales had done which long ago, at her mother's side, she had been allowed to taste as a relish and impulse to the real study of life.

It was her first red-letter day, and when after dinner, as the elders were sipping their coffee, Dot filled a bon-bon box with nuts, candied fruits, and confection, and slipped it into the pocket of the brown calico dress, she bubbled over, saying in a low voice to Clare,

"For papa."

A nod from Clare, and Mrs. Hamlin asked,

"Does your father find work plenty, Barbara?"

"Oh yes. He is busy every day."

"The great block on A Street, is n't it?" asked the observing professor.

"Yes, sir."

"Mamma, we are both going to walk part way with Barbara, and Jack is to call and go with us. May we be excused?"

"Yes, dear; and, Barbara, you will come again? We shall always be glad to see you," drawing her kindly to her side.

In the confusion following Mrs. Hamlin only heard the whispered thanks and saw the look of sweet response that lit up the young face. This was her every-day life, had been the same for years. The daughters of the house had known no other life, could comprehend no other. They could not understand that it was as a glimpse of paradise to Barbara; that it would go with her as the memory of a grand picture and shed a radiance upon her shabby room and common toil that would sweeten life for many a day.

After this Barbara not only spent an hour or two with her new friends occasionally, but the outlandish look of her dress began to disappear; gradually changes were made, so gradual that the child herself scarcely noticed them. Indeed it was one of her characteristics to forget herself almost entirely in her many duties and varied employments; for although the simplest child in mere worldly matters of life outside her own

little sphere, at home she was the moving power, the home-maker, the thorough little housekeeper, employing every moment for her father's comfort and her own advancement in knowledge.

There had been no remarks in her presence about her dress, not a word or glance that could wound her or enlighten her regarding her style of costume. Whatever help she received must be delicately rendered. The child must never feel that such accessories had anything to do with friendship. Thus one Saturday afternoon as the three were planning in Clare's room a little excursion for the coming week, Mrs. Hamlin appeared on the threshold followed by her maid, with three new hats and a great box of trimmings.

"Now, my 'three little maids from school,' I saw these pretty hats and thought you'd like to trim them up to suit yourselves for the autumn. Clare knows how to do such things very nicely, and I am sure Barbara has deft fingers. Do them just as you like. And, dear, this brown one suits you exactly. You will let me treat you as I do my own two; so trim it and wear it home."

"You are so good to me, Mrs. Hamlin."

This was the opening wedge. There was nothing about it that could offend the most in-

dependent father or sensitive maiden. One after another, slight and becoming changes were observed in Barbara's humble attire. As the fall advanced a woollen check replaced the thin print frock; a close-fitting little jacket, made by the child herself under the eye of her new friend, appeared as the mornings grew cool—so modest and unassuming that the captious Nellie could find no occasion for remark.

Mrs. Hamlin would gladly have fitted her out with the same her own girls had, but wisely judged that to teach her to be self-reliant, and allow her to feel that she was herself doing the work, was the true charity. For does not real charity envelop itself in gracious apparel and seem to ask the favor of bestowing?

The next day Clare was the centre of a group of girls, upon which Nellie, Edith, and their followers turned their backs, but not without a suspicion that they were depriving themselves of something more valuable than sweets.

"Girls," said Clare, "I have a plan to place before you. I want your help."

"Good! Speak out. We are all ready; we are competent to help you into or out of any scrape you have in mind."

"Only this, Ettie; I have thought lately a good deal of Barbara—"

"That's evident to the dullest of us. But

go on, saint Clare; free your mind; we are not envious of the poor thing."

"Do stop, Ettie. Give Clare a chance."

"You know, girls, how very, very hard it is for her to get on comfortably, so busy every morning at home, getting so little time for study that she has not a moment for enjoyment. She does everything for her father, and she 's just as pretty and sweet as any of us, and a good deal smarter. She misses her mother too, can't speak of her. Think, if it was any of us, girls! We ought to make her happy. Don't you think so?"

"Of course we ought. I am desperately ashamed of being so mean. I 've nagged her fearfully. She must hate the sight of me."

"She is incapable of it. But you are not alone, Belle."

"I know it, and it rejoices my depraved heart; misery loves company. We are all in the same box, all but you, Clare."

Belle Fletcher laughed carelessly. She was a bright-looking girl, older than the others, and appeared able to lead them, had she desired.

"Nellie 's the hatefulest of us all; but then she 's an only child. I 've heard they were generally spoiled," interrupted Ettie.

"Barbara 's an only child; so am I," piped a younger one of the group, well satisfied.

The elder girls laughed, and Ettie good-naturedly clasped her hands and swung her vigorously round.

"We must try to win Nellie, girls. I don't believe she means it all."

"Her mother puts her up to it; she's fearfully aristocratic, you know, and has taught Nell to feel that the earth is hardly good enough for her to walk on. For my part I hate extremes."

"Yes, I agree with Belle. I can work, in moderation, but I should hope never to be overwhelmed with it, and formality and style for every-day fare would be worse still. The mere externals of life ought not to stifle the freedom and comfort of home. But, Clare, what's your plan?"

"I have no definite plan, girls; only can't we manage to overcome Nellie's prejudice and make Barbara happy at the same time? I am sure her splendid recitations have stimulated us and we average higher since she came. Don't you think so?"

"No doubt; she's such a midget, I'd die of shame to fall very far below her, but I never was a dig."

"Granted that she is a help to us in this way, if we can, by being friendly with her, make her life brighter and teach her a little more tasteful style of dress, without letting her know that we

are aiming at that, it seems to me, girls, it would be a lovely work to do."

"How shall we do it? Each give her a cast-off garment?"

"Never, never! She must not think that we have noticed her lack of skill in dress; only let us bring her within our circle. That is the first thing to do; the other will follow naturally."

"I see, Clare; take the rough bit of granite and each of us give a sly rub; engraft upon her gradually our own refined elegancies. I can agree easily, but what 's the motive?"

"Her happiness would be enough. It might have a refining influence upon us."

"You mean me, Clare. I don't blame you. I deserve it, but it cuts all the same."

"Forgive me, Belle. I was thinking of the class."

"Must we invite her to our homes, as you do?" asked Ettie.

"If there should be occasion when not to ask her would seem a slight."

"Well, so be it. I 'll try to swallow my pride, as my mother says when she goes to Mrs. Percham's grand receptions. And, Clare, if any of us stick out a cloven foot, just rest your saintly eyes on us until we are subdued. Your standard of right and wrong is fearfully high. There 's the bell. And that fascinating little martyr in

homespun has been digging away at her Cæsar while we have been planning to give her a liberal education in art."

The weeks passed and Miss Gray noticed that her pupils, most of them, seemed vying with each other to make Barbara's life as brightly happy as their own. A small circle still kept apart with Nellie. She had wondered at the growing intimacy of the carpenter's daughter with the larger part of the class, many of them at first as bitter as herself.

It could not be from any effort of Barbara's, for she seemed not to notice any change. She was absorbed in her work.

Nellie felt ashamed of her petty persecutions. Barbara was being transformed before her from a beggarly nobody to a high-souled, heroic student. Was she wavering? Was she doubting her mother's policy? No, indeed. She believed she almost hated the strange girl who had made her so wretched.

"She has spoiled my happiness and I just despise her." Angry tears filled her eyes. After this she refrained from open annoyances, but her feeling of contempt was more than ever apparent.

Clare could not comprehend such a spirit. Hope and trust that nothing could jar filled her soul to overflowing.

Uncle Eric had whispered to her upon noticing her expression of annoyance after an unusually disagreeable encounter with Nellie,

"Don't be troubled, child; right will triumph in the end. Remember you are hoping for the welfare of both Nellie and Barbara, and you do not work alone. It is *with* Him as well as *for* Him, and He will surely give the increase. We have proved Him in the past, you know."

"Yes, uncle; but Nellie's spirit surprises and grieves me. I feel so helpless between the two."

"With God all things are possible. You are trying to do more than your share of the work. He doesn't give it all to you; be patient, take the burden to him. He will lead you, and by-and-by a blessing will come. Never fear, my child."

"Oh thank you, dear Uncle Eric, you give me courage."

"Keep close to the Master and you'll never lose it."

CHAPTER VI.

MINISTERED UNTO.

EVERY effort of the associate teachers of the Hill School to break through Miss Gray's reserve and win her confidence had failed. Day after day she came among them promptly at the appointed hour, with not a moment to spare for friendly courtesy or social intercourse. She would give neither time nor opportunity for strangers to pierce her armor of silence.

Paler, more fragile-looking than when she began her work, she often appeared at the close of the day too weary to make an effort to reach home. But she would not yield. Her iron will was battling with her waning strength. Her overmastering sense of duty compelled her to press on and would give her brave spirit a victory over the frail body. These bright, cheery young teachers, full of enthusiasm and healthy vigor, marvelled at her quiet endurance, and wondered what had sapped her life of its freshness and glow. She must have passed through seas of trouble, but not a word or look appealed to any for help or sympathy.

Prof. Hamlin studied her with perplexed in-

terest. He was puzzled. Was she sacrificing herself for some object unworthy of her pure and beautiful womanhood? Was she jealously guarding a secret sin or sorrow of her own, or another, loving the sinner with her pure nature, though trembling and fearful of the degradation? She was young to shut herself away from all communion with her kind.

But how did he know this was her object? Life out of school might be triumphantly joyous; this might be but the mask of a proud spirit which rebelled at the necessity of labor. But no; he felt that he had wronged her by the thought.

He had sometimes tried to relieve her weariness, but in vain; to lighten her tasks, but she ignored all such efforts. She would accept nothing from any one. Yes, she smiled at Jack's rough friendliness, and returned simple thanks for Barbara's daily offering. The quick fire of enthusiasm lit up her face sometimes during her recitations, but it was fleeting.

The master found himself strangely annoyed in thinking of a life so hedged about with mystery. He determined over and over to give no more thought to it. If she chose to look the incarnation of wretchedness and refuse all offers of kindly interest, what was it to him? Nothing. And yet day after day she appeared

before him, silently and unconsciously appealing to all that was chivalrous within him. He expected to learn that she had sacrificed her youth and hope and almost life itself for some grand scheme that in its failure had broken her heart and taken every ray of light from her life. He found himself sometimes gazing at her still face with a great pity, until the least quiver of her mouth and slight tremble of her eyelid revealed to him that she felt his gaze and was annoyed. Then, impatiently dubbing himself a brute, he would determine to show no more interest in her.

He was a man of singularly rare traits: open and frank by nature, he never swerved from the narrow line of truth and rectitude; concealment was impossible, deception most repugnant; nothing so much excited his scorn as falsehood, and no pupil won a smile of approval more quickly, even though guilty of wrong-doing, than he who frankly and truthfully confessed a fault.

One day in late summer before the hour of closing school there were sudden signs of a storm; great masses of clouds gathered over the sky, throwing a gloom across the landscape and darkening the rooms so that study was a failure. The distant thunder muttered ominously, and as a flash blinded them for an in-

stant, Mr. Hamlin gave orders for the classes to be dismissed at once; there might be time for all to reach their homes before the tempest broke upon them.

Books were speedily replaced, garments hastily snatched, and the clatter and rush of the hurrying throng was heard over the stairs and through the halls. In a few moments the great building was nearly deserted, the teachers having speedily followed their flock. Only Mr. Hamlin and Miss Gray remained. She had taken her hat from the dressing-room and stood by a window in the main hall, looking out at the angry sky and approaching storm.

The great elms that lined both sides of the way swayed furiously in the wind; pedestrians were hurrying along, eager for shelter; horses sped through the streets impelled by the rush of the elements or the lash of the driver; and still she stood as one dazed and helpless.

A voice broke in upon her revery. "Have you far to go, Miss Gray?"

"Do not wait, sir. I will remain here, if I may; I can't reach my home before the shower."

"Allow me to wait upon you; I always keep an umbrella in the building for emergencies," taking one from his private room.

"I must not trouble you, sir; I had rather wait."

"It will not be pleasant to spend a night here, Miss Gray, and it's already late; I really cannot leave you."

"Very well, I will go; perhaps I shall have time. No, sir, I will not trouble you," she added decidedly, as he appeared about to accompany her.

"Really, Miss Gray, you do wrong. I cannot allow you to go alone; it already rains and there will be torrents in a few moments; I must either go with you or stay here with you. It would be poor policy for me to allow you to expose yourself to an attack of illness. Pray be reasonable."

She looked from the window anxiously and drew a light shawl closer about her; great drops were already falling upon the pavement and the thunder kept up its angry incessant muttering; flash after flash of lightning played over her as she stood uncertain by the window. A timid glance of indecison at his face as he waited for her to be less unreasonable, another lingering moment at the window, and he saw her whole face light up with the same radiant smile that had once before covered it with a beauty that was very fascinating.

"Shall we go?" he asked.

"Here is Jack, sir; he will go with me. Pardon me, I could not bear to trouble you, it is so far," she said apologetically.

"It would have been no trouble," and he turned away, preparing to lock his door.

Like a miniature storm-spirit Jack tore up the stairs, flung himself into the corner where Miss Gray waited, breathless from haste and wet from the rain, exclaiming,

"Good! I 'm in time, Miss Gray. I thought you 'd be gone. Mother sent these things for your feet, and I 'm to take you home, she said. I can put them on—I do it for mother," he added, dropping on his knees and holding the sandals for her. In a moment they were on.

"Thank you, Jack. We 'll go now. Good-night, sir."

Mr. Hamlin watched them rushing up the stormy avenue with a look of discomfiture on his fine face. How readily he would have rendered the same service; he wondered why they were more acceptable to her from that great rollicking boy. He was all in the dark. He knew nothing of her lonely life; of the early aspirations to be of use in the world and exert a loving influence over many who were near and dear, all crushed; of hopes and desires long since laid away one by one, until the heart was hopeless and the whole world held nothing to be desired.

He had seen something of her power over the wild, wayward boy, but he could not know

how much to her was the pleasure of feeling that in all the crowd *one* life had perhaps been made better by her efforts. It was a joy to know that she lived to some good purpose, even though all her own plans had failed—a quiet joy that she could cherish without interfering with the unending duties that filled her days. It was not strange that Jack could bring the brightness of her happy youth back to her face. We love those we labor for, and she had learned to take a deep interest in this boy, who had already been won to better things through her gentle influence. She did him good, not perhaps as the sun warmed and brightened the earth, but as the rain that washed and purified.

On went the two at a rapid pace, and down came the rain in great splashes, thicker and faster; the gutters were swollen into angry brooks; the lightning played about them, and the thunder seemed to crash just over their heads; they were dripping; but on they went, on and on. At last the city limits were gained. Jack was mystified. But he said nothing. As they were passing a long row of high wooden buildings, at the farther end she stopped.

"Here we are, Jack. It 's been a long walk for you. I 'm very sorry, but you see it 's off the line of cars, and I *must* walk. It 's too bad."

"Not a bit of it, Miss Gray: I 'm glad for you though."

"Come right in. No, indeed, you must not go back now; wait until the shower is over," drawing him into the hall.

"Had I better?" he asked, with unusual delicacy.

"You must, Jack. There 's no other way."

The house seemed full of people—a family on every landing, Jack thought as he followed her. Up, up they went, to the upper story, when she turned round, and taking his hand, said,

"Jack, I have a brother here; he is very ill. You will not mind?"

"No, indeed, Miss Gray."

"And—dear Jack—as it is my secret, it shall remain so with you?" she asked, her lip quivering.

"Of course, Miss Gray. You may trust me. But I will go back if it troubles you."

"No, come in, Jack."

He followed into a low square room, plainly furnished, where a woman was preparing supper. In a large chair near the stove sat a man, older than Miss Gray, but with features so like that Jack knew at once he was her brother. He looked up vacantly as they entered, but sank away at once into a stupid, dozy state, without noticing them again.

"Is supper ready, Mary?" asked Miss Gray.

"When you change the wet things it will be, deary. Sit here, young man, and dry yourself," bringing a chair for him.

Jack was glad of the warmth, but half sorry he had not turned back at the door. The storm still raged. He must stay now, but he would make it as short as he could. He did not now think Miss Gray's reserve strange. He felt for her a tender pity. He wished he could do more for her, not dreaming that the most acceptable thing would be to live worthy of her friendship.

He noticed a strange incongruity among the furnishings of the room. The floor was covered with a colorless old carpet that once had been rich, and here and there a piece of rare old furniture showed itself to slight advantage among the poorer, more modern pieces. There was no attempt at display, but the room was immaculately neat even to the little, cheap-looking stove before which he mused, and from which the fragrant odor of freshly-made tea assailed his senses.

When Miss Gray returned she urged him so sweetly to sit at table with them that all his resolution vanished, and pulling off the thick coat that had proved a slight protection, he took the offered chair.

From this moment the teacher's reserve vanished. She introduced her old nurse, who sat

near her and poured the tea. She beamed upon him over the frugal board, and talked in a low tone, but cheerily, until supper was over. Had any one asked the boy of what it consisted he could not have told. All through it the invalid sat quietly dozing or uneasily muttering in his chair.

Occasionally Jack glanced pitifully in that direction, although he respected the evident but unexpressed wishes of his teacher. He saw a tall, skeleton-like frame leaning back helplessly among cushions, whose face looked pinched and gray and hair prematurely white; his hands were like claws with the yellow skin drawn over in wrinkled folds. He scarcely moved a muscle while Jack stayed. He had had his supper, Jack heard the nurse say, and seemed unconscious of anything about him. All through the autumn and winter following, packages of fruits and other dainties were left now and then at the door on the upper landing of this house. If Miss Gray knew from whence they came, Jack also knew how acceptable was her silent gratitude.

Not once since that first passage at arms with Miss Gray had Jack been subject to reproof from Mr. Hamlin. He was winning golden opinions from the master, and her manifest regard was incentive enough to change his waywardness

into a most delightful comradeship for them both. He often quoted his mother, and she learned to look upon the unknown friend through the son's eyes.

"Mother would like to have you come and see her, Miss Gray. She would call on you, but it 's a long, long time since she has been out of the house."

"Is she very ill, Jack?"

"Not so very, the doctor says; just enough to keep at home and make us all happy. I tell you, Miss Gray, there is n't a spot in the world so bright and jolly as mother's room. We are all there evenings."

"You are to be envied, Jack. But I am sure your mother will excuse me if I do not call. You know how much it would please me, but I have little time or heart for ceremony; my life now is one of work."

"Too bad!" he muttered.

"Not that, Jack. It has been appointed by a wisdom we may not understand."

One sunny Saturday morning Jack drove up to the great bald-looking city tenement house, and fastening his horse climbed the stairs to ask Miss Gray to ride with him.

"Would you like a breath of country air, and a little tramp in some grand old woods I know not far from the city?"

The very thought gave her new life, and soon they were on the way, as free and happy as old friends. Little jets of thought and sentiment flashed between their souls; the almost flinty look of her face passed away as the stern necessity of endurance was forgotten. Jack said enthusiastically,

"I feel as if I had always known you, Miss Gray; I felt so the first time I saw you at school."

"All whom we meet for the first time, Jack, are not strangers; and many that we talk with every day for years would always be unknown to us, and we to them. A new face sometimes has friendship written all over it. The meeting of such souls is an event in life. It may have been so with us."

Jack was happy; for Miss Gray's reticence had never before allowed her to speak so freely even to her pupil. Few had seen beneath the calm exterior; few understood the hidden strength she held in reserve. To this fun-loving, merry-hearted boy had been revealed more of her rich nature than to any other, and he loved her as he would an older sister. But he was shy with all his frankness; he hardly ventured to show her all the feelings his heart held for her, little knowing, boy as he was, that she read him as an open book.

"You must have some flowers, Miss Gray, to carry home."

"Yes; can we explore these woods? Is there time?"

"The whole day if you choose," and drawing up to the roadside he helped her to alight.

It seemed to Jack that his teacher for once might throw off all care, all thoughts of cold duty, and give herself up to the full enjoyment of this delightful freedom. So long and dreary had been the time since she had roamed the tangled wildwood. She was a child again; the low branches, she said, brushed all the cobwebs from her brain. It was exhilarating; a freshness came in soft color to her cheek, a light and sparkle to her eye, new to Jack, who watched the changes in her as an artist absorbs himself in a picture.

She was at home with nature. She knew its secrets. She found the sly crevices where the lichen-cups conceal their jewels, the solitary spot where the fragrant twin linnæa grows most luxuriantly and the delicate mitella sends up its white raceme; her quick eye detected the partridge-vine with its scarlet berries. She saw where the rankest clumps of ferns were concealed, and gathered the uncurled fronds in great generous bunches and mixed them with the curiously shaped maiden-hair, carrying back

to the carriage enough of the wealth of the forest to "trim her humble room most gorgeously," she said.

"Now let me help you in, Miss Gray, before I unhitch, and here is a little lunch mother sent, for she says it 's hungry business to ride in the country."

"Why, Jack, how delightful! What a thoughtful mother she must be."

"She 's just a daisy." And Jack drew out a dainty willow-basket, jumped in beside his teacher, who felt more like a happy girl than she had for years, and opening the tiny hamper he spread a napkin on her knees and held the lunch before her. "What do you like best, Miss Gray? Here are sandwiches and crackers and ladies' fingers, and under this napkin are some olives. Do you like olives?"

"Delicious, Jack; to tell the truth, the very sight gives me a famished feeling."

"I don't wonder. We 've been roaming round for hours; it 's after lunch-time by considerable. Mother always knows just what to do. See here!" and he drew out a flask with a little cup.

"What have you there, my boy?"

"Milk, pure and simple. It 's mother's panacea for everything; she lives on it."

"That 's sensible. Fruit too!"

"Grapes. Eat all you can, then we 'll gather up the *debris* and jog along."

"Jack, I 've had a delightful outing."

"So have I. I 'd like to give you one every week, Miss Gray."

And all through the days of study Jack anticipated his approaching Saturday holiday, glad that he was able to bring a fresh glow to his teacher's cheek and a new light to her eye.

The faithful old nurse emphasized his invitations by every inducement she could hold out for her young mistress to accept. She saw it was renewed life to her and the promise of more strength for an uncertain future. She knew the pressure of grief and harrowing anxiety was sapping her power of endurance, and would eventually endanger health and life.

Many a delightful ramble they took together after this, many a secluded spot of almost primitive beauty they discovered and explored, sometimes walking to the nearest woods through old, well-shaded roads, which turned and wound in all directions from this unsettled quarter; for the demands of the growing city had not encroached as yet upon the farming district. More often the pony and cart, Jack's gay little equipage, drove up to the humble home, causing a flutter of neighborly excitement among the kindly people of the block, who had in some way

learned that the pale, weary-looking girl was bravely bearing a depressing burden on her frail shoulders.

Then those cool, bracing mornings, overflowing with the precious elixir of life, those rides over the hills, through tangled lanes, down into broad valleys, where now and again, through clumps of chestnut, oak, and fragrant pine, they caught snatches of wondrous beauty—far off beyond the river's peaceful flow, among the hazy, distant hills, where rich autumnal colors rioted. Here and there masses of New England granite lined the way, covered with thick damp moss, and from each cleft and rent, bunches of fern and vine upspringing seemed to bid them welcome.

The red-tipped woodbine flamed on stump and fence. Clematis spread here and there in great masses, clinging to everything it could touch, throwing out its long, graceful sprays of feathery seed vessels for them to grasp as they passed, bitter-sweet winding and climbing audaciously, laughing down at their often vain attempts to capture it; and the wild grape winding its wealth of fragrance about the white birch which bent to its support. Never had the ripening glories of the year so appealed to them as now. Nature was at her best.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FLIGHT SOUTH.

THE summer was but a memory, the autumn at its brilliant height, gorgeous and perfect; crimson, gold, soft yellows, and rich browns reigned everywhere; over all the perfect blue of heaven brought out the glowing tints of ripening foliage, luscious clustering fruit, and sharp, bold lines of reddish-brown and warm gray rock, covered with great patches of moss and clinging lichen, each day more crisp, cool, and breezy than the last. Summer's valedictory was rehearsed in jubilant measure.

On such a morning Aunt Clarissa made her appearance at her sister's, her small, delicate features and quick glance full of mystery and desire to reveal it.

"What in the world has happened, Clarissa?"

"You may well ask. Where 's Edward?"

"At the office; he will be here at lunch. Why?"

"Read this letter and you will know all I do."

She laid aside hat and wrap while Mrs. Hamlin eagerly perused the letter.

Let us take this time to furnish a clew to the cause of Aunt Clarissa's excitement. Their only brother, Harry Brainard, had met with overwhelming business reverses. His fine property had been swept away, his home was in the hands of strangers, the wife and three children looking to him for daily supplies.

Stunned, helpless, unknown deprivations staring him in the face, and they, the slender wife, the two manly boys, the five-year-old girl, like a bud just unfolding into delicious beauty, with their bewildered, frightened gaze fixed upon him as the rock of their strength towering above their feebleness. He looked on them and suppressed a groan. This was no time for weakness. He must gather his forces, throw off this creeping paralysis, this overpowering lethargy, not be routed by adversity. He girded himself for the conflict and smiled bravely in their trusting eyes.

From that moment the wife's courage asserted itself. The two boys were filled with ambition and determination to help their father retrieve his fortune.

The sisters knew nothing of this change of circumstances. He would not write until he had better tidings to communicate or something definite.

At last his plans were formed. He had spent

his boyhood upon the farm at Stanton Falls, and since his marriage a large Western farm had given him a competence until now. No other way of success seemed possible to him. He understood no other work. By no fault of his own he had lost his inheritance and the result of twenty years' labor. He must begin again, with the added weight of years, the added incentive of a beloved family.

Gathering the fragments, he converted all not needed for immediate use into ready money and wrote a few curt lines to his elder sister:

"My Dear Clarissa:—We have disposed of the farm, are packing and in great confusion. Have decided to make a new home farther South. Shall be ready the last of the month to start with our belongings for Florida. Shall not be able to see you before we go. Hope some time to have a place where you can enjoy your winters. Inform Dolly, and for the present address me at Jacksonville. Shall not remain there, but take advantage of a temporary offer and time to select a place. All letters will be forwarded from there."

The sisters were amazed; this dear younger brother going to an almost unsettled country, for all they knew! The Western home had seemed far off, but they could meet easily and at any season. Now what possibilities lay be-

fore them? What might not happen before they could meet again? What could it mean, this breaking up of the comfortable home after eighteen years of happy life in it?

It was like a blow in the face to the elder sister. Her whole soul had enveloped her brother in the strongest affection; every added member of his family circle was welcomed as her very own. They had met but once during the five years of Maggie's adoption into her secluded life, years in which she had found the only true happiness, that of giving. She had watched with ever-increasing interest the subtile changes from wild deformity to the grace and beauty of Christian development. It had been a blessed change for the friendless, neglected, and abused child. It had certainly filled the lonely woman's life with the highest joy, of striving for a human soul; and Maggie, who had not desired to "know Jesus," in her satisfaction with these delightful new friends, learned slowly, surely, day by day, that He was the first source of this wonderful change going on in her young life. Gradually the name grew familiar and dear; a reverence too deep and holy for words to portray governed her conduct and overcame the sad results of neglect and abuse. She learned to drop from speech and action the unlovely dress of her earlier life, and knew at last that

her body might become the fit temple of the Holy Ghost and her soul be hid with Christ in God.

Like a rank weed from the wild jungle she became transformed by culture and generous, loving care into a sweet flower in the garden of the King. A blessing had come to both hearts thereby. As all true joy finds its source in Christ, Maggie learned through Aunt Clarissa's patient teaching to trace each added blessing of this strange experience back to the love that was every morning new and every evening fresh.

Now Clarissa's quiet duties were interrupted; together the sisters studied every syllable of this unwelcome missive. At lunch Mrs. Hamlin explained to her husband, asking with emotion, "What can it mean, Edward? What crotchet has he in his head? Is he wild or sick?"

"Neither, I think; but it's a sudden move."

"It can't be a matter of health."

"He says nothing of the sort—a purely business arrangement, I judge. It's a risk."

Aunt Clarissa looked flushed and pained. It was as though a child were going astray and she powerless to restrain it.

"It's not like him; evidently he has nothing permanent in view."

Mr. Hamlin shook his head.

"Ready, Eric? I 'll go with you a piece. Harry seems unsettled. I don't like the look of it."

"Nor I. There 's some mystery about it, something wrong, Edward, and my mind is made up. I can reach them before they start. I shall go at once," struck in the sister sharply.

"Why, Clarissa, what are you thinking of? This cold weather!"

"Not a word, Dolly. I shall go. The dear fellow is in trouble. I can read between the lines. He needs help. This bravado is only to mislead us. That mortgage is at the bottom of it, and if so we must help him. But I 'll go to him to-morrow, and I depend on you to start me off safely."

"Don't be rash, Clarissa," said her brother-in-law with a perplexed expression.

"I 've thought of it, Edward, from the first. I shall go home at once and be ready to come in by the first train. I leave all the details of the journey to you, but I must see his face before he goes so far from me."

"Edward dearest," began his wife.

"Don't speak of it, Dolly," laughing into her pleading face. "It 's impossible for me to leave now. Don't think of it, dear."

"Let me go with sister. I must see them. We don't know what is before them."

"True; but so far at this time of the year? Think!"

Miss Brainard looked doubtful, then brightening, said, "Let her go, Edward. She 'll be miserable without. I know just how she feels. He 's a dear brother to us both. Clare can take her mother's place, and it wont be over ten or twelve days at most. Trust me to look out for her comfort first."

"Oh you are to be trusted. Well, have it your own way; but do n't forget it 's a time for sharp changes, and protect yourselves."

"How lovely!" said Clare. "I wish I was going."

"You must take your mother's place, Petkin; it 's a grand time for you to learn."

"We 'll make things go swimmingly, wont we, Clare?" sang Dot, dancing away to get ready for school.

"Shall I stay at home and help you, mamma?"

"Yes, Clare, you may begin duties at once; I shall have a host to do. Going, Clarissa?"

"I must catch this train; so glad we can go together, Dolly. Take as little luggage as you can. I could go round the world with a gripsack. But now for the Falls; fix Becky and Maggie and be back early to-morrow. Was never so shaken in my life. If Harry Brainard

thinks to dodge me in this way, he 'll find I 'm up to him." She laughed grimly. "Oh I remember his boyish pranks; but he never got the advantage of me, Dolly."

"Oh, Clarissa, what a host you are! I shall feel as safe with you as with Edward."

"Safe! No trouble about travelling anywhere in America safely now-a-days, or for that matter, the world over. Women are a power, Dolly. Good-by; there 's the carriage!" and with a breezy air she was off.

There was a small tumult of preparation in the old family mansion at Stanton Falls that night; but before they slept every arrangement was perfected for an early start the next day.

Maggie hardly knew how to take this first parting, and smiled rather dubiously, until her adopted aunt kissed her with a swift, tender motion, saying, "I shall be back in two weeks at most, and if you want to spend a day or two with Clare, Becky wont mind being alone. I shall write from Chicago. Good-by, Becky. Do just as you please about everything."

With almost the elastic spring of girlhood the self-reliant spinster stepped into the carriage that was waiting to take her to the station. Her brother-in-law met her in the city. They went to the house together.

"You can start in an hour, or wait until evening and make good connections."

"We will go at once. I don't want to wait a moment anywhere."

He smiled at her spirit. There had always been a feeling of good fellowship between them.

"What a royal man of business you would have made!"

"I 'd have owed no man anything, you may be sure. I 'd have no outlying debts or mortgaged property; a shanty North or a tent even at the South, but I 'd own every rag of it or nothing."

"I believe you. It would be safe if not luxurious. If the boy 's in trouble let me know. We must share the load with him."

"Of course. That 's one grand use of the family. Such needs rightly met make the ties strong."

Then followed instructions as to the route of travel, time, connections, and possible delays, a note or two in case of doubt or perplexity.

"Have no fear, Edward; I can use my tongue, and conductors are long-suffering and patient. We shall go through all right. But think of their amazement when they look upon us."

"Yes, I 'd like to look on that scene."

Clare, now the mother's helper, was somewhat oppressed by her new burden of responsi-

bility and carried a serious look in her gentle eyes. Dot fluttered about with a vague desire to help which proved abortive.

"We shall go at once. Dolly, are you ready?"

"Clarissa, how you rush; electricity is slow compared to you!"

"Well, we must be off. We'll rest in the cars and have a long day of it. Clare, Maggie will be in for a few days, so don't look woe-begone. Good-by, dear." Her mother held her tight.

It was Clare's first experience of the kind. Oh how faithful she meant to be!

Uncle Eric drew her in from the steps, where she lingered watching the departure.

"Is it weighty, little housekeeper?"

"I hope I can make you all comfortable."

"No doubt of it. You will be as famous as your mother by the time they are back."

"How we shall miss her!" There was a thrill of pathos in her voice. This short separation was painful as an unknown sorrow to the clinging girl. She had never before known the home without her mother.

Uncle Eric's cheer helped the machinery to run smoothly for his favorite during this short absence, and there was no apparent change in the household affairs.

For the two weeks following Clare returned to the former method of study, reciting occasionally evenings to her uncle. To her it was a pleasant change. Barbara missed her and the support of her favor, and Nellie asserted her old power over a few fickle minds.

We must take a flying trip with the sisters to the Western home, which in due time they reached, to the amazement of each member of the busy family. It would be impossible to portray the feelings of the brother; he was speechless. This unexpected apparition of the only two remaining from the life of the past almost unmanned him.

His younger sister clung to him sobbing even as her own Dot would have done, but Clarissa stood erect, her face pale, her eyes fixed upon his.

"Well, Harry Brainard!"

"I hope it is well," with a slight tremor in his tone.

"I came to find out."

"God bless you, Clarissa!" He grasped her hand and kissed the firm mouth that would have trembled had her will been weaker, but she was in the habit of controlling her emotions. She held herself with a powerful grip. She had been called hard by superficial acquaintances; those who knew her well had fathomed

the depths of her nature and knew the treasure hid beneath its surface. She was one out of many—rare, self-contained, womanly, but resolute, strong, and hopeful.

The wife and boys were overjoyed. It was a heavenly day for them, this coming of the two, from whom but the day before they had seemed for ever parted, into their life of toil, weariness, and unspoken fear. It was enough to turn the darkest night to glowing day.

"Let 's drop the packing, wifie, and have a day of unmitigated rest, enjoy our guests, and throw care to the winds."

"That 's right, Harry. Dolly and I came to help, but we must have our argument first. Are we powerful enough to forbid the banns?"

"Too late for that. But, little woman, can you and Ned get them up a lunch? and let 's have a holiday. Upon my word, but I feel like a boy again."

"I 've never considered you any other than a boy, and this mad freak is the climax, it seems to me."

"Do n't be sharp, Clarissa. It 's all right. What started you?"

"Your letter, to be sure. Did you think, Harry Brainard, to take advantage of me in my old age?"

He laughed gleefully, throwing back his head in the old delightful way.

"I never shall again, wherever I may be. And Dolly, too. How could Edward trust you so far without him? He 's a grand old fellow."

"Harry, I should have died not to have seen you again."

"We 'll have many a gay home-coming yet, no fear. See how our baby Kitty has grown; our song-bird we call her. Go to auntie, dear. She 'll soon remember. We have talked of you so much, she knows you both and all the youngsters. How are they?" Thus the light words flowed over the undercurrent of the hidden sorrow they dared not touch upon.

A quickly-prepared chicken, delicately warmed potatoes, fresh eggs, and a fragrant cup of coffee revived and cheered them all. The rest of the day was devoted to serious explanations, doubtful plans, and uncertain hopes of success.

"I can be nothing but a farmer. I have lost the place irretrievably. I can't buy another here, and I wont leave my boys the burden of debt I have staggered under for years."

"Don't talk of leaving at your age," exclaimed the younger sister.

"Well, then I wont harness another debt upon my own shoulders. I have saved enough to take up a few acres of Government land in

Florida. I think with the boys' help I can clear and farm it so that in a few years it will support us."

"Meantime!" exclaimed Clarissa.

"I'm coming to that. We must live carefully, work reasonably—well, do the best we can with the little surplus that will remain."

"And you are bent on going? You will not give it up?" with an eager hope.

"We are pledged to try it. A friend in Jacksonville has engaged a position for me to take care of groves for a gentleman who has a large estate and can give a fair salary. Ned can help to advantage. We shall live close, save all we can, take time to look about, and make the best selection we can for ourselves. What have you against that?"

"Sounds very well, but there are two sides to every story. The winters will no doubt be delightful, but how will you both manage the long, hot summers? It must be simply fearful."

"No, they tell me the heat is not intolerable, because the low peninsula is swept by either the ocean or gulf breezes daily; the nights are cool and longer, the hours of sunshine are shorter than at the North, which people do not always remember. This friend has spent two summers there, and says he has never had better health."

"Is he a salamander?"

"Then the frequent rains change the temperature daily and make it a delightful climate even in the hottest season, so *he* says. In a year I'll give you my experience; you may want to sell out and join me, Clarissa."

"Never! But if you should fail of your El Dorado, the old home stands ready always with open doors and a warm welcome, if I am in it."

He reached out and took her hand. "My plan is more for my boys than for myself. I can give them no inheritance here; we can make it together there."

"Perhaps."

When they were alone she insisted upon his taking a generous check, telling him she had plenty and no earthly use for it but to share with others, and his claim was first. Should he buy land, she would like an interest in it; and if he ever had to mortgage his home again, let it be to her. "Let us keep our family affairs in the family after this, brother."

"We will; but you see how it was. I made a mistake, but I did n't want you to know it."

"Proud fellow! Trust your old sister to find out your blunders. I shall keep my eye on you after this. And, Harry, be careful of Lucy. It 's to be a new experience for her. She 's not strong; give her plenty of help. Remember I

stand ready to help you out. Don't fail to let me know just how you get along. I feel as though you were all going to sure martyrdom."

"Not so bad as that; but you shall have facts as fast as we make them."

The labors of the following busy days were lightened by the sisters' willing hands, and they decided to break up a few days earlier and all go on to Chicago for a little time together there before the final separation.

"The present state of my finances forbids my inviting you all to the swell hotel of the city," began the brother doubtfully.

"Now, Harry, this is to be my treat; I planned it from the first. I shall pay all bills and we are to spend three days at the best hotel. This is to be my last outing until I see you again."

"So be it. I'm resigned, Clarissa. That last day of boxing Lucy's treasures lamed every muscle in my body; but they're well done; they'd go safely around the world. And now for repose and the delights of sight-seeing."

Oh those days! It would be difficult for them to slip from the memory of any one of the little circle. They came to an end at last. The parting over, they turned each to their own destination, satisfied that they had met, sorrowful that they must part, but with increased hope.

The sisters were soon at home rehearsing to eager listeners the whole story. The other party, fresh from the three days of delightful rest, went on towards Louisville, Chattanooga, through Atlanta to Jacksonville.

In ten days the first tidings were received, and Clarissa bowed with grateful love to Him who had proved their guide and helper. She could indeed sing, "I will trust and not be afraid, for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song."

CHAPTER VIII.

"INASMUCH."

NELLIE MILLER was a lonely schoolgirl at this time. The few who still hung about her were not favorites. Quick to read their motive, she tolerated them in lieu of better company. Clare's stern idea of duty had seemed to increase the trouble.

She told her mother in a querulous tone that all the fun and frolic had been snatched away from her by this new-comer. "And, mamma, I fairly hate her. All the nice girls go tagging round after her just because Clare has taken her up."

"Well, child, be patient. It's only a new freak of Clare's for a time. It will wear off. You shall have another party at once, and by-and-by a little Saturday four-o'clock lunch. You'll win them back: don't look so miserable. You must be more of a philosopher, not mind these little changes. Your own position is made; you have only to keep and enjoy it. There's no more sense in crying over a lost playmate than over spilled milk."

"Clare's worth more than that. You don't know her. I wish I was like her."

"Heaven forbid! This charity glamour will wear off, and your friends be glad to come back to you. If Clare holds out there are others as nice, so be cheerful. I can't abide a doleful face, you know. Stick to your principles; it will all end right; trust your mother for that. Now take that bunch of jacqueminots to Mrs. Ellis; she is very fond of you and she likes flowers, poor thing. You 'll have time before you go to school."

With such crumbs of comfort Nellie's soul had to be satisfied.

After this Clare attempted more than once to win her, but was rudely repulsed.

"When you give up that ragamuffin we can enjoy each other, not before."

The difference grew to more than a childish quarrel. Principles instilled into every fibre of Clare's nature by her large-hearted uncle were assailed by this selfish, unwise mother. And so Nellie's pretty face grew sullen, her delicate lips closed with a firm, hard line not pleasing to the view. Clare's patient eyes irritated and Barbara's unyielding good-nature enraged her. She was sure her mother was right. It was unfortunate to have been born in a republican country, with everything so mixed. Of course she must do nothing, even as a schoolgirl, that would ruin her prospects for life, and she would

not have anything to do with that class of people; she never had, only to try to do them good by giving to their necessities. Of course she was charitable; it was a pleasure to give to those who were suffering. It was much in the spirit of throwing the poor dog a bone; but no loftier motive had been held before her, and with intense satisfaction settling about the saucy lines of her mouth she contemplated the coming gay party. For once she could have her old friends to herself; and if it was any gratification to Miss Barbara to share in the good time, she would do up a nice basket of fragments and send to her after the fun was over. She thought she understood the meaning of a Christian spirit as much as Clare Hamlin did. It would be a good way also to teach Barbara her place and help her to understand that she could treat her kindly though not tolerating her society. Of course, as her mother said, there were ways of settling all these social questions; happily she had hit upon one.

The holidays were nearing. The term would soon be over. Ettie proposed a contribution for a gift of books to Miss Gray, she being the only teacher who had not at some time been remembered by her classes in this way.

Nellie could share in this, and with some ostentation gave generously, noticing with a

perceptible sneer the tiny coin Barbara gleefully passed into the collection, as much satisfaction on her lovely face as though the sum had been a hundred-fold. In her unworldly thoughts they were children of one Father, on the same plane — all gifts equally acceptable, even as all His children were alike beloved.

The girls were not all educated to this standard; and when Clare put into Ettie's hand the same amount that Barbara had given, but few of the girls understood the delicacy of the act. Nellie's secret thought was, "Clare has a mean streak about her, I am sure, for she could give more if she wanted to." She turned away; Clare followed, and slipping her arm within Nellie's, said,

"Nell dear, we are going to give Barbara a surprise Christmas eve. Come with us, will you?"

Ah she would have liked a share in their merriment. "Are you all going?"

"Yes, all who wish. Burr and Jack help us. Dot goes too. We shall have a real good time, Nellie. Do go with us."

"Way out to that lonely old house?" in surprise.

"Yes, it's just a nice walk."

"I'll ask mamma," with a show of interest; "she is very charitable. She belongs to

several associations and expects me to be liberal."

"Oh, Nellie, you mistake. This is not charity. Barbara would not accept charity."

"Why not, I'd like to know?"

"She doesn't need it. They are perfectly independent. She would be grieved enough should we do it in that spirit. Her father would be indignant too."

"I don't know why. I thought such people were always glad to take what they could get. They are poor enough."

Clare flushed, hesitated, and explained: "It is like this, Nell; they are certainly poor, in a sense, but they have enough for comfort, and would be amazed to be thought objects of charity. And indeed they are far from it; but Barbara has only her father, who can't understand all she needs to bring brightness into her life. And her mother, sick so long, could not help her to know what she really ought to have; so we are going to make fewer gifts among ourselves and much simpler, that she may see no difference, and give the more to her."

"H'm! That's why you gave so little for Miss Gray. Well, you are a martyr, and for her."

"No, I love to encourage and help her. Do join us, Nellie."

"What shall you give her?"

"Skates: that she may go right along with us all winter and be happy. Mamma thinks that 's best."

"I 'll tell you to-morrow, Clare."

"Uncle Eric likes it."

"I suppose so." Nellie did not add that according to her mother the principal was quite too quixotic in his views, and a dangerous leader outside the schoolroom.

It was evident that if the two parties were to be united, now was the time for Nellie to yield. She saw it dimly and was casting about in her young mind for some common ground whereon they could both safely stand.

While Clare's plans were maturing, Barbara was longing for the power to show some sign of grateful love towards her friend. The lower rooms of the old house were bright. The father had just come in from his day's work and Barbara was stepping from the stove to the table saying in her high flute-like tones,

"Sit right down, father. Tea is drawing and I 've got just what you like, a bit of tender steak and baked potatoes; and look, these hot, crisp rolls. What could be nicer?"

"Bab, you 're a famous little cook, and I 'm ravenous."

"Good! That 's delicious. I 'm always so

glad to have you hungry, father." She set the hot juicy steak before him, brought the tiny brown pot of tea, and folded reverently her hands while he bowed his head in thanks a moment.

"I've good news, father. I'm to make a jump at school. Clare and I and Ettie are to be promoted next term, not wait for the close of the year."

"Good news that, Bab. How happens it?"

"Well, it's more to relieve Miss Gray, I think, her number is so large. Perhaps we do stand just a bit higher. The girls say so: but they don't care. We like Miss Gray, but we do want to push on. When I get through I'll keep house for you ever so much better."

"I'm satisfied, Bab. You're a grand, good fellow for a lonely old man to have around. Any more news?"

She was on the floor with a saucer of milk for Tabby, her only pet, but came towards him quick and eager.

"Yes. The girls are going to give keepsakes to their friends Christmas. Father, I do wish I could think of something for Clare. She has everything nice. Could I, father?"

"I don't know. The money gets used as fast as it comes. How would one of the inlaid boxes do that your—" He could not finish; his

loss was too recent. Barbara understood; her arms were round him in a moment.

"They are lovely, father dearest, but never mind; Clare knows I just love her without anything."

"Well, girlie, I 'll make one for the lady's gloves; you may line it with something nice."

Barbara knew her father's meaning. She was to take some bright bit from her mother's pieces. He could not talk freely yet, even to her.

She looked the few things over the next day, selecting from them a rich color for lining the box. It was very beautiful when finished in a variety of woods, inlaid in artistic patterns and polished highly. Even Clare, with her rare taste and skill, would be proud to place it among more costly gifts.

Bab's enthusiasm was refreshing to her father, and long before the time for its bestowal the box was laid carefully away, to be given with loving simplicity later.

Mrs. Miller was willing her daughter should contribute liberally to this poor girl's necessities, but to go to the house as a guest was out of the question. There would be no end to annoyances resulting from such a course. So the word came back the following day. Half sorrowfully Nellie said,

"Clare, are you all going to that out-of-the-way place just for a whim of yours?"

"No, Nellie, we are going to do just as we would be done by. If Barbara had everything and we had nothing, she would do the same for us. You know, dear, 'Inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these, ye did it unto me,' and it 's so precious to have a part in it, Nellie."

"We can have a part, Clare, without all this familiar foolery. I believe if you were to give a grand reception you 'd ask her; you just look as though you could do it, Clare Hamlin."

"I am sure it would be impossible not to do it. She 's too pure and sweet to be despised. I wonder you can feel so."

"I don't trouble myself to despise her, but mamma says you will spoil her among you. She 'd make a fair ladies' maid; she 's quick and skilful. But if you fill her head with ideas beyond her station, she will certainly be unfitted for her life of work."

"We all expect a life of work of one kind or another, I suppose; but kindness is a help, not a hindrance. And, Nellie, whatever her work in life, her position will not be inferior, you may be sure. Uncle Eric thinks her niche will be high. We shall not need to look down upon it. We can't tell who will toil the hardest. It may be you or I."

"How horridly you talk, Clare."

"I only mean that change comes to every one and it will come to us. We don't know when or how or what. So you wont go with us?"

"If you want money, Clare, I 'd like to work with you."

"We want only kindness. This is not work, but a frolic. I 'm sorry, Nellie."

She turned away. She would win her yet. Love, patience, hope are powerful allies. Clare's face shone with the glow of each attribute. She could wait. She knew in whom she trusted. She was not working alone. How keenly she felt that Nellie was yielding to the power of sin in treating with contempt one of Christ's beloved disciples. How earnestly and patiently she longed to win her to a better spirit.

Christmas eve came, sharp and clear, with stinging cold; a bright moon shed luster over the city, pencilling wavy silhouettes of swaying branches upon the pavements, shining upon the half a dozen girls who were nearing Barbara's home, Jack and Ettie's brother Burr as escorts.

"Are we expected, girls?"

"No, indeed, Jack; it 's to be a surprise. Wont her eyes round out!"

"Good! I meant to come empty-handed; but mother—you know her ways, Clare—in-

sisted on sending this along. I suppose it 's all right." Jack's tone was a little doubtful.

"Your mother always does just right, Jack."

"That 's a fact. Burr, you 're shirking. Take your sister's other basket; see her stagger under its weight, lazy-bones."

"Be quiet, Jack. You 'll raise the neighborhood. How many pounds do you carry?" Burr had a basket strapped from his shoulder and one in each hand. Indeed they were all generously loaded.

"Just lift, will you? My mother 's a little woman, but her heart 's big as ten of some I know. She 'll crowd more stuff into a small space, I tell you: the way she ordered cans and jars and things piled in here! Your load is nothing to it. I 'm just played out. Here, Jip, help your master." With an uncontrollable desire for fun, Jack whistled his dog to his side and put the handle of the basket into his mouth.

It was a failure. Jip was small, the basket heavy; after making several ineffectual efforts to obey, pulling at it, whining and growling over it, he gave a meek wag of his tail, looked pathetically in Jack's face, and sat down beside it. There was a shout. How easy it is for boys and girls to laugh! How soon they lose the trick when youth is gone!

"Oh, Jack, let up on the little fellow. He 'd do it if he could. Come on."

"Yes, indeed. Give it here, Jip. Good dog! They 'll all be abed before we get there if we don't hurry up."

Jip barked and leaped about them, quite satisfied at the turn of affairs.

A bright light rayed out from beneath the curtains of the windows as they reached the house. Barbara was alone. Her father was later than usual. She thought he was getting something a little nice for the morrow. The kettle hums on the stove; the oven, door ajar, emits a pleasant odor; the table is laid simply for two; and the clang of the old-fashioned knocker brings her to the door.

A noisy greeting salutes her. The light shines in the merry faces. Bab's eyes are big with wonder. With shy grace she bids them enter, Burr, Jack, and Jip in the rear with their loads.

"Why, girls! Why, girls!" was all she could say.

"Boys too!" sang out Jack.

"I 'm glad to see you all. I wish I could give you all seats," in a pretty embarrassed way. "I 'll bring chairs from the other room."

"Never mind the chairs, Barbara. Let the girls take turns; plenty of chairs—too many

guests, that's all. Jip, under the table with you."

"We've only come for a few minutes, Bab, to leave a merry Christmas with you. You've done so much, Miss Gray says, to help the class on, we want to do something for you. Put these away for the morning; they are not half as nice as the lovely box. I shall keep it for ever. It's exquisitely made, Bab."

"I knew you'd like it. I'm so glad."

"Clare, do sit down and let me have a fling at the hostess," cried Dot, throwing a gray fur about her neck and putting the muff to match in her hands with a little shriek.

"It's very becoming! Wont she be stylish!"

"Are they for me, Dot? And you too, Etta. What can I say?"

"Don't begin yet, Miss Bab; we're not half through; after we go you can take account of stock. Give me a chance, girls. Burr, stand aside. These are all to eat. You see I judge you by myself; I have a weakness for jam and jellies, pickles and sardines; and here are some of cook's Christmas pies—they're mighty nice. This chicken is roasted; that's mother's idea, so you'd have nothing to do but take a ride with me to-morrow at two, sharp. We'll be back to dinner. Will you go?"

"Do you really mean it, Jack?"

"Well, girls, when were any of you so modest as to question an invitation in that style?"

"Indeed he means it, Barbara. Jack gives us all an occasional ride," explained Clare.

How she flitted from one to another in her bright, birdlike way, answering their curious questions about her housework, telling them with childlike frankness and evident pride of her ministrations to her father, of their modest, careful mode of life: up at the break of day, and with but time to make the early meal and plan the noon lunch which her father must take and the supper at night; then, leaving the rooms orderly, off for school.

"In the name of goodness, when do you study? how do you keep up?" asked the amazed Burr.

"Oh but I study evenings with father. He helps me; he knows it all. We have such nice evenings, don't we, father dear?" turning to the door where a man with arms full stood, an interested spectator of this unique scene.

"These are my schoolmates, father. And this is Clare," taking his packages. "She likes the box, oh so much. And they are all lovely girls, father—and—and boys too."

Never before had these amused young people been introduced so informally. They were beginning to understand that there was a cer-

tain naïveté and grace about this child of nature as winning as mere cultivation of manner.

They saw a face high above them, beaming down with an amused look upon the one so like, but brighter than his own, a face marked with proud self-dependence and determination. Then he turned upon Clare a penetrating, kindly look. She at once emerged from the group, saying,

"The box is beautiful, Mr. Allen. It was very kind of you to make it."

"Not so kind as you have been to my girl; you have made her happy; and, young lady, a blessing surely follows such an act."

He spoke low; but they all heard and comprehended.

Barbara's glad tones followed them as they sent back the last good-night and left her to enjoy her treasures. Never had she possessed so many.

"An umbrella, father, from Etta. I never had one of my own before. My name on it too. I will keep it for Sunday. And skates! Now I shall learn; oh how I long to begin!"

She bubbled over with delight. She had never counted on such wealth of possession. Her sweet spirit and sunny nature had never felt the limitation of their circumstances. She had not realized that she was deprived of what

others made daily and lavish use of without knowing their value, common gifts bestowed as God's sunshine is, flooding lives with sweetness, unthought of until withdrawn.

Prayer, love, and hope and work are golden grain
None sows in vain."

CHAPTER IX.

BICYCLE-RIDING.

MISS BRAINARD and Maggie had come in for a long day with the Hamlins. Letters had reached her, which she brought, and there was much to be talked over between the sisters. The tidings were fairly good. The friends were safe in Jacksonville, the brother in his usual buoyant spirits, Lucy already refreshed from the fatigue of travel, satisfied to be once more within walls she could temporarily call home, the boys excited and jubilant. A new world had opened before them. Young people delight in change. Everything was now *couleur de rose.* Ned had sent Maggie a few pages descriptive of the journey and his impressions of the new country. Of course he was full of enthusiasm. He went even so far as to intimate that he thought it a streak of luck that the old place had slipped from them, as it made it possible to provide another in this delightful land of bird-song, flowers, and summer skies. Such skies he never had seen, such wonderful masses of clouds on the pure, intense blue. He hoped she would some time see it with her own eyes.

Maggie had a tender memory hidden away of Ned's begging his aunt to allow the homeless waif to share her love. He had always been a hero to her since; a quiet, peace-loving boy, but full of noble thoughts and generous impulses, one whose whole ambition was to study medicine, heal the sick, and relieve suffering, but who readily, without any show of the disappointment he felt, gave up his cherished plans to work with and for his father.

For the present Mrs. Brainard and the two younger children would remain in Jacksonville, while the husband and Ned would go at once to Hernando County, near the Gulf coast, where his work was to be—a large estate, made up of orange-groves and other fruit-farms, of which he had the control. He could not tell until he had seen the place whether it would be best for Lucy to live there during the following summer or not.

Harry was to be sent to a good school immediately, it being doubtful about educational opportunities farther south.

The letters were received with varied comments. Clarissa's tone had an anxious jar in it that would not be repressed.

"If they could only *all* stay at Jacksonville it would n't seem quite so foolhardy."

"The orange-groves are south of Jackson-

ville, Clarissa. If he farms it he must be among them. He 'll get the family together before long though; I believe there are suitable means of conveyance now. They could reach each other at any time in an emergency; and for Lucy's first season I should say Jacksonville was safer. But Harry 'll move warily, never fear."

"I hope so, Edward." Her voice was almost explosive. She could not make it seem right. She was silent and thoughtful through lunch. The chatter of the three girls went on unnoticed; the brothers discussed matters foreign to the one subject that absorbed her; Mrs. Hamlin was laughing with Dot about something of no importance; and she herself was miles away, following her boy through pine forests and sandy roads and unknown solitudes. How dear he was to her! and through these fearful hardships she could be of no use to him but to make sure that they had everything that money could procure. She had enough to share with him, and she was thankful that she had, the dear fellow! "All the boy I've got. God preserve him in that wilderness!"

Soon after lunch Barbara came in. Miss Brainard recognized her kindly and Maggie effusively. Many a girlish frolic had they enjoyed together.

"Have some lunch, Bab?" asked Dot. "Not

a bit? Well, take off your things and come up stairs with us. We 're going to try a new game."

Barbara was ready for any fun; she was Dot's equal in the matter of pure physical exercise. She made a charming picture in her plain dark suit, set off by the gray furs, with a little hat of the same color, her cheeks blushing with the frosty air and exercise. The matter of dress, which she had given no thought to in her mother's life, had transformed her, though still of the simplest.

Off they went, and Clarissa turned to her sister. "How is Allen doing? Does Barbara get on well at school? She 's a pretty thing. They were terribly poor when the mother died."

"They are doing well now. Clare is very fond of her. She 's bright. The two are well matched, though very unlike. Eric is bent upon taking them along with him as rapidly as is safe. Like a gardener, he plants all kinds of sweet rare things, and just revels in watching the growth. He lets Dot severely alone, and for that I feel grateful. Sometimes it hardly seems as though Clare belonged to me, he has such power over her."

"Well, do n't interfere. He 's doing a grand work for her. I sometimes see a girl in what you call high social standing, with a father absorbed in money-making and a mother in spend

ing. I wonder that they have the fragment of a mind to cultivate or character to form."

"Don't be bitter, Clarissa. A society girl is not necessarily devoid of Christian principle, as you half imply."

"Well, Clare has the advantage of a teacher in the home; his daily influence moulds her life, keeps her up to a noble standard. It 's a great help to you. You 'd hardly take so much time for outside matters with a clear conscience without his help."

"Maybe not. I had not thought of it so."

"Oh yes, we should have more of the right royal make of girls among our wealthy class, if each family had an Uncle Eric or a more self-sacrificing mother."

"How strangely you put it, Clarissa."

"Ah well, it may be a trifle sharp, but I have plenty of time to watch and think on social problems."

"There must have been a rare brave soul in the slender physique of Barbara's mother. The child speaks of her with a tender memory; every thought, every word she utters, shows an artlessness that wins us all."

The conversation then turned upon the subject nearest both hearts, the distant brother's new life. They rejoiced over their first letters, but were not satisfied.

"I suppose I *must* be patient, but I do want to hear more. I want to feel sure that it will eventually be a success, or better still, we shall have them safely back. As Edward says, it may not be much farther off, but to me it's an unknown region, and the bare possibility of their need of us at a time when we could not by any means get to them chills me."

"You have chided my want of trust, Clarissa, often. We must not fret about him. I have faith in him, so strong he is, you know."

"Only One is strong, One is mighty. Our faith must rest alone on Him."

"I know, I do believe it, but I forget. Edward thinks he will succeed, and has promised to take me there as soon as they are established."

"I shall go with you."

"Most certainly you will. So pray don't look on the dark side another moment. It is not like you, sister, to doubt; so fling fear away and let us be happy."

Eric Hamlin in his great, comfortable lounging-chair before a glowing grate, a table covered with books near, was reading. The day had gone well. Miss Gray was appearing more at ease, was not embarrassed by his efforts to make her class-work less burdensome. She had even ventured a request in regard to a certain

change of hours. He was glad to comply. It is doubtful if he could have refused her anything within reason. And yet he was unconscious that she held for him any interest other than any faithful assistant would receive.

As he gazed into the red coals his musings were interrupted by shouts of laughter overhead and an unusual noise, rolling, tumbling, and rattling of metal on the hard floor above him. His study was directly beneath the amusement hall, as the great attic was dubbed by Dot. The noise testified to a merry time up there. The chatter was inspiring, the laughter contagious; it was irresistible. He thought he would go up and see what mad pranks Miss Dot was enacting. He took them unawares. Barbara was hanging from the trapeze and Dot upon his bicycle, with a girl each side to steady her, trying to learn the art of riding. As he entered she called,

"Maggie, hold the horse. I 'm well mounted this time. Keep off the track, Clare. I 'm sure I can do it. Start him a little, Maggie, till I get my balance, and hold me tight."

"Dot, you 'll break your neck or the wheel. What would uncle say?" said Clare.

"These ponies don't need to be broken, Clare. There 's uncle! Oh, Uncle Eric, I 'm trying your bicycle. S'pose I 'll make it go?"

Barbara dropped to the floor and Maggie looked a trifle anxious.

"No reason why you should n't. Let me help."

"Do help me; I 'm determined to learn."

"Bravo, Dot!" With much persistence she soon learned to steady herself and control the machine under his guidance.

"I shall be glad to teach you all to use the wheel. It is good exercise for you."

"That 's sensible in you, Uncle Eric. Now let me go alone and see if I can turn my fiery steed and come back."

"Do n't be afraid; I 'll catch you if you fall."

"I do n't want to take a header, if that 's what you call it."

"No chance with a 'safety.' Now let me show you how to stop and alight."

"Take me, take me, I 'm going!"

As the wheel tipped she lost control, but was caught by her uncle and safely landed.

"Will you try, Clare? Would you like to learn and have one of your own?"

"I do n't know. It would be nice out of the city perhaps," a little doubtfully.

"I would, uncle; and if Clare does n't dare, why can't you take me? Do, Uncle Eric. Would n't it be grand sport! Barbara, it 's your

turn; then I'll try again. I *will* learn, and papa shall buy me a bicycle."

At night Dot assailed her father.

"Papa, I want a bicycle, a girl's 'safety,' like Uncle Eric's. I'm going to ride with him next summer. We're going to learn up stairs this winter and be all ready when the season opens. Will you buy me one, papa dearest, right away?"

"To-night?" dropping his paper to contemplate the sprite.

"No, to-morrow, though. Will you, papa?"

"Well, I think that's going a little too far, even for such a flutter-budget as you, pet."

"You don't mean to refuse, papa?"

"I think I must."

"Then you're worse than an infidel!"

"What!" from her astonished father as she flung both arms about his neck and showered kisses on his face.

"Dolly Hamlin, I can't have you speak to your father in that way," said her mother with unusual sharpness.

"I can prove it, mamma, by the Bible."

"I can't allow it, Dot."

"Let her prove it if she can. So you think me an infidel, little daughter?"

"Worse, papa, for I need the exercise in the open air. Uncle Eric is going to get one for Clare, and you know as well as I that the good

Book says if you don't provide for your own household you have denied the faith and are worse than an infidel. Haven't I proved it, mamma Hamlin?"

"It 's not respectful, Dot."

"Well shown, my girl. I 'll look into it."

"Eric, are you going to encourage such doings?" Mrs. Hamlin asked.

"Why not? The girls would like it immensely; splendid exercise for them. Yes, I approve of it, certainly."

"I have seen what they call tricycles for ladies," she said thoughtfully.

"They are adapting the 'safety' bicycle to girls' costumes. I think I shall get Clare one for next summer; let them learn up stairs."

"I shouldn't be surprised to see you and Clare taking a balloon ride any time, some aërial trip among the spheres; but I 'm dumb as far as you are concerned in the matter of education."

"It wont be long before you will see girls using the new bicycle all through our streets; and more, they are beginning in England to play cricket, as their brothers do. We 'll have that here, too, soon, I hope. More of such sports would give a larger measure of health among our girls. There is no reason why they should not take hold of suitable athletic games and reap the benefit from them which boys do."

"I believe in it, uncle. I don't want always to be packed into a carriage when I go anywhere, like cats in a basket. I think it's time we were more independent."

"More independence for you would be dangerous, Dot," said her mother.

"But, papa, if Clare has one can I?"

"When you can ride Clare's I'll think of it."

"I'll do it. I never see Jack go spinning by on his that I don't wish I was a boy. It's better than riding on a pony, perched up sideways, as though you were making a ceremonious call. I'd like to go galloping over the country as that lovely friend of yours, mamma, did with her missionary husband in Maui. Do you remember? That was perfectly delightful."

"All you need for it, Dot, is the divided skirt. It would be safer, mamma."

"Yes, Clare, and it might do in that wild country, over rough paths and among those natives; but don't put any more extravagant notions into Dot's head," answered the mother.

"That dress will be adopted eventually for exercise out of doors, and it will be a sensible change," said the uncle.

"And I'd like to start the fashion, Uncle Eric."

"I believe you, Dot. I'll ride with you any time in such a costume."

"Eric, I beg! She 's hoyden enough now. Come, Dot, go and play something. I think we are getting along too fast; I can't keep up with these progressive ideas. I 'm sure Dot has plenty of exercise; she 's all motion, and what more could you ask?"

"Oh do n't fear, sister; I 'll leave you Dot; I am content with one pupil. And, Clare, we 'll try your 'safety' within the week."

"Really, uncle?" with animation.

"Really," he replied.

It was not long before the upper floor of the Hamlin mansion rang with the merriment of the riders. It seemed to the mother as though the walls must come down, but she trusted to the leadership of Eric. Often they prevailed upon Barbara to join them, and she too became an expert. Before long Uncle Eric proclaimed that when the spring came they would be able to make a fair appearance on the road.

Meantime Nellie's select reception had come off. A costly new dress was required for the occasion. Every girl and boy seemed happy to accept the invitation so daintily put forth. The whole affair was carried out with elegance. Nellie was radiant, adorned as only the heiress of great possessions could be. The evening proved a brilliant success. The general verdict was that none could be so charming as Nellie

when she was perfectly satisfied and had everything her own way.

When they met the next morning she asked, "Was it nice, girls? Did you enjoy it?"

"Delightful! Everything was perfect! What a lovely dress, Nell! That's the fun of being an only child; there are too many at our house for luxuries."

"Shame, Etta!"

"Why, I didn't say which I preferred—brothers or bon-bons," laughing in her careless fashion, for they all knew that all of Etta's four brothers were heroes in her opinion.

"Clare, I've sent your humble follower a basket of cakes and things; we had so much left, and I knew she never could get such."

"Not Barbara!"

"Yes, of course. Mamma thought it was the best use we could put them to; they were too good to throw away."

"Nellie, you haven't!" Clare was indignant.

"Why, yes. John was taking them as I left the house. Why not, pray!" a quick flush on her cheek.

"Pretty cool, Nell, I should say," from Etta.

"Nellie, it's an insult. *Can't* you see it?"

"No, Clare, I can't. I have as much right to be charitable as you. Mamma said it was perfectly proper; and she'll be glad enough of

them. Why there were some whole loaves, and lots of confectionery and flowers."

"I 'm sorry, Nellie. Can't you recall them? Bab is so sweet. She wont mind your not inviting her; but this—"

"I—inviting her, indeed! I should think not."

"Nell!" exclaimed Etta, "I 'd get that basket back if I had to foot it all the way out there, and throw the contents into the gutter for the gamins."

"I 'm sure I don't know what you both mean, and I don't care. She 'll eat them fast enough, and be glad of the chance."

"You are mistaken. Would you send such a basket to Mrs. Ellis or to Miss Gray?"

"It 's very different; of course not."

Clare 's eyes filled. What could she do? Nothing. Nellie had over-reached her, and Barbara must suffer. But she knew nothing of it yet. She met them with her sunny smile and bright greeting, the only undisturbed one of the group.

Whether it had been Nellie's intention to wound or not, Clare could not determine. If she could only prevent the hurt from reaching her little friend, if she could delay the pain in its coming to that tender heart, she would do anything. Should she take Bab home with her

to lunch? But what then? Must that sensitive spirit be subjected to this indignity? To gather up the pieces left and send to such a one—as to any beggar—when she would have graced the company as much as any one of them! Clare could not and would not bear it. She must see Jack. There would be no opportunity until the close of school, and then she might miss him. She would confide in her uncle—always the safest thing to do.

She asked and obtained permission to go to his room, found him alone, and told the story. He had never seen her so moved.

"She must not know it, uncle. She must not be insulted."

"No. Has the girl no delicacy? Adding insult to injury with a vengeance."

"She knows better. We have talked it all over before. If I can see Jack, I can fix it. I must try."

Jack was sent for and Clare confided her trouble to him. "The little goose," he said, "does n't she know any better?"

"No matter about that, Jack. I want you to go there; the basket will be with the people up stairs; just ask for it, and take it to the orphan asylum for the children. I 'll take the responsibility."

"Do you dare?"

"I wont have her insulted. I will dare!" She looked like her Aunt Clarissa then.

"Good for you, Clare; I 'll do it. It will be a gay old prank. Can I laugh with Barbara over it?"

"Not for the world."

She returned to the class with more than her usual gravity. Miss Gray noticed her disturbed state and Nellie looked discomfited and sullen; but the object of Clare's solicitude was buried in study, unconscious of the tumult being raised in her behalf.

During intermission Clare kept her seat, apparently absorbed in the lesson before her. No one disturbed her; and Nellie, chagrined at her disapproval, made no other boast of her fragmentary gift for charity's sake. If she anticipated a grateful acknowledgment the following day from Barbara, she was disappointed; not a word of thanks from "the little ingrate," to show that she had received her bounty.

At night she poured her woes into the worldly mother's ears.

"Not so much as a thank you for that great basket of the richest and best we had left, and heaped with those elegant flowers hardly wilted! That 's the way with such people."

"Why did n't you ask her how she liked them?"

"Clare and Etta gave me such a snubbing for it that I would n't. I wont have anything to do with her. Clare hardly looks at me now."

"No doubt they enjoyed eating them, if they do n't know enough to acknowledge the benevolence," remarked Mrs. Miller, as though weary of a subject so far beneath her.

"Oh she knows enough. It is n't that. I should n't wonder if Clare had told her not to notice it. She seems fairly bewitched by the beggar, and Jack just toadies to them all the time. If you 'll believe it, he took her to ride the other day!"

"That 's of no importance. The Ellises are too old friends to be influenced by one so obscure, and next year Jack will be in college; then there will be no chance of their meeting. Take no more notice of her; you have shown her kindness; she chooses to ignore it. Let her drop."

"I wish she would, mamma, entirely out of sight."

"And if Clare is disagreeable, let her severely alone until she comes to her senses. That uncle is making her ridiculously prudish. I should think her mother would interfere; she knows well enough what society demands."

"They all know—they do n't care. I like Clare."

They were interrupted; a note was handed Nellie and her face grew scarlet as she read.

"What does it mean, mamma? A note of thanks from the matron of the Children's Home, saying they enjoyed my generous contribution of cake and candy, and the flowers were welcome to the little ones in the sick ward. What can it mean?"

"It means that the little minx sent the basket there in your name rather than take a favor from you. That caps the climax. Never let me hear her name again. Audacious!"

"Then Clare told her to. I'll find out. I'll never speak to her again if it is so."

"No, no, Nellie, that wont do. They have influence; and Clare is too mild to advise such an unheard-of impertinence."

"I don't know. She's capable of making a martyr of herself for a friend, but she wouldn't be spiteful. It's that horrid little lump of pride and poverty. I'll tell her what I think of her the next time I see her." And she did. The large dressing-room of the elder girls was the scene of a fierce indignation-meeting at noon of the next day. Nellie's shrill voice rang out as Barbara entered:

"Barbara Allen, if you can't be thankful for kindness, you needn't be spiteful and mean!"

"I don't know what you are talking about, Nellie. I haven't been spiteful, have I?"

"What did you send that basket to the Home for? Tell me that."

"What basket? I'm all in the dark, Nellie."

"Come here, Nellie. Don't say any more to her. It's nothing, Bab. Let me explain. Take Bab away, Etta, do."

"You're my prisoner, Babette." Etta laughingly drew the astonished girl away. She did not understand the mystery, but Nell was always in a snarl; she could trust Clare to ravel her own tangles.

And how patiently she tried to do it: tried to save her little friend the knowledge of what to her seemed wanton cruelty, tried vainly to win Nellie to a nobler spirit, to prevail upon her to pardon an interference that was kindly put forth, though she acknowledged perhaps unwisely.

"And *you* did that, Clare!"

"Bab knows nothing of it; I could n't let her be hurt."

"Hurt! I'd like to kill her."

"You don't know what you say. Do forgive me if I did wrong; I meant it for the best. I love you both; do let's be friends, and call it a foolish little joke between you and me that we will keep from Barbara. I'm sure it was nice

for the dear little waifs to have your bounty, Nellie. I thought they would love you for it, and when you knew it you would be glad. Don't be angry, Nellie, for I would n't hurt you any quicker than I would Dot."

"I don't believe you. I 'll never forgive you—meddling with what does n't concern you. I shall tell the girl what she 's lost through you."

"If you do, Nellie, I shall be wretched: to have her treated so! Nellie, don't."

"I will; I don't care for either of you. Here, you Allen girl! See how your *friend* treats you." Then and there she poured forth the story, with such flashes of anger and bursts of scorn that Barbara was well-nigh petrified.

"I sent you a gift worth as much as they have given you. She stole it from you; see what a friend you have."

The class were horrified. Only Etta knew what Clare was now enduring for her friend. The silence that followed the outburst was oppressive. Barbara looked from one to another like a frightened fawn. Clare had dropped into a seat, her head in her hands, her slender form trembling. It was the impulsive Etta broke the silence with her careless speech.

"You 're making a mountain out of a mole-hill. Do you think, Nell, the world wags just

for you? and no matter who suffers, as long as you don't? Clare meant all right; she always does—though what the fuss is about I don't know, more than the man in the moon. If the rest of us had more conscience we'd have fewer fights. Come, let's call this particular fracas ended and be friends."

"I want to know if Barbara Allen approves of such interference."

Very slowly the knowledge had dawned upon Barbara that Clare had saved her, in some unseen way, from Nellie's unkindness. She looked fearlessly into the angry eyes bent on her. "Clare could not do wrong, Nellie."

"Don't call me Nellie. I suppose she is your saint; you can worship her for all I care; but *I* sent you a gift."

"Then Clare knew I couldn't receive it."

"Why not, Miss Pert?"

"Because you meant an insult; you are proving it. It is dreadful for us to quarrel so." There was not a shade of irritation in her tone. She crossed the room and hugged Clare close and lovingly.

"Now I hope the storm's over. Come, Nell." Etta drew her away.

Worn with passion, conquered but furious, she allowed herself to be led into the recitation-room.

That Barbara still must bear the pain was Clare's most biting sting; but she did not know yet the strong spirit within her friend, governing the child every moment of her life—the native sweetness that made it possible for her to ignore injury and rise with pure gladness of heart above any base, tyrannical act. Had Nellie been able to understand Barbara's character, she would have bowed her head in shame before her. She never learned the part Jack had taken in the affair, and to him Clare was silent; he only saw they were no longer friends.

Was it the influence of Christ's presence that enabled Clare and Barbara to look upon Nellie with a pity so tender and a love so real they could only plead Christ's pardoning grace to purify the angry heart and subdue the bitter spirit? The friends felt that only the gentle Saviour could conquer that proud will, and to him they went with the faith of little children.

CHAPTER X.

NOTHING VENTURE, NOTHING HAVE.

MAGGIE had early broken the bonds of neglect and ignorance from which Miss Brainard had taken her. She had developed an earnest nature, strong, decisive characteristics, with ambition awakened to accomplish something more, that, with all her reaching, was not to be found in this refined and orderly home.

She had left the village school behind, had graduated from the academy near by, and was now longing for an object in life, a work to do; to be a power for good somewhere.

There was no lack of household stir at certain seasons, and nothing in the home needing to be done but came within her capacity. Miss Clarissa had been a faithful teacher in such accomplishments; and Maggie was trusted as the child of the house.

She pondered the subject daily. Other girls were pushing out into the busy world from secluded lives that often meant mere aimless dalliance with the years, until burdens suddenly came with crushing weight which they were not fit to bear. It might be so with her. She

had no claim upon these kind friends. She might, at any moment, have to stand alone. But it was not selfish fear that moved her; far from that. It was but looking out upon life from all points, that she might be ready for what she must meet.

Aunt Clarissa's own practical instincts had been grafted upon her; she readily adopted her wise maxims. How often had she heard her insist upon "taking time by the forelock," and never to "be left without resource." It was well, she had said, to buckle on the harness in youth, and stand on your own feet and be independent; "necessity is a powerful weapon;" she "would n't give a fig for one who had never felt its spur." These sharp, concise epigrams, uttered in her energetic manner, had impressed Maggie more than the spinster would have desired, had she dreamed of their far-reaching influence.

Nor was this her whole motive. She dared to think she might be of use in the world, might in some way help to make life bearable, perhaps beautiful, for those who suffered, as she once had. Ah! she could never forget those years, those bitter years of cold, hunger, abuse, and fear, those dreadful years that went back—back to a dream. Was it a dream? How many times it had come since! That vast, dark body

of water; that swift-sailing craft; a fearful storm; the rolling and plunging of the tossing vessel; the gulfs of darkness; the dizzy heights; the awful fall into more fearful depths; the crash, the stupor, the dread awakening; arms that had unclasped and left her helpless in the clutch of some one, she could not tell who or where! Night after night the scene had come back; she had wakened to think it all over, and in despair had said, "How foolish! It 's only a dream; but I wish I could make out the truth."

Aunt Clarissa knew nothing of these vague impressions that might be but the play of a lively imagination. Had Maggie talked more freely with her of this life of dreams, the spinster would have remembered a few little undergarments, with the two letters M. D. delicately worked upon them. Not much worn, evidently outgrown, they had been found in a box at the place the child had called home, and brought to Miss Brainard, who, thinking they might be a clew some time to her parentage, had put them away, intending to show them to her by-and-by. But it had grown to be a delicate subject with her; she had hesitated at first, and later shrank from speaking of what she thought might best be forgotten. Thus Maggie had never seen the little garments that must once have been made for her by loving hands.

The very uncertainty of her position insisted upon recognition. There was a power within clamoring to be felt, a voice that would be heard. With all her will she tried to silence it; but back it came. She grew thoughtful, and at times not happy as she knew she ought to be.

Aunt Clarissa noticed it, and thought she might be pining for young company. Then she would bestir herself and pack her off for a few days with her nieces, or send for them to come from Friday until Monday, to put new life into the old house.

This was not enough for Maggie, delightful as it was, and she whispered,

> "'T is life, whereof our nerves are scant,
> . . . . More life and fuller, that I want."

It suddenly developed into speech, and she told Aunt Clarissa that she ought not to live in idle luxury when there was so much in life to do. Would she be willing for her to try her hand at something?

"Why, my dear child, you work enough now; what more could you do?"

"Of what use am I here?"

"Think of the help you are to me. I could n't live without you."

"Not live, auntie? You used to tell me to take no liberties with the truth. I do n't do much for you; there is n't much to do; and you

don't need me. I'm of no real use, just a fifth wheel. I feel shut away from the workers in the world."

"You do! Like a toad in a well, you can't see the whole heavens. And pray, what would you do? Teach? We'll have a private school in the dining-room at once."

"No, no, auntie! I've no skill for that; but I *could* use my hands. Clare can do anything with her pen, Barbara with her brush, and Dot could teach music, if she must. If I could only—" she hesitated.

"Only what? Be a housekeeper? You do that now exquisitely, and I flatter myself this is a good school for you to remain in. Better be satisfied, silly girl."

"I have tried, auntie, so long—" with a tremulous tone.

"Well, out with it. What's in your mind?"

"I want to be a nurse, a real trained nurse. I want to join the spring class at the hospital. I'm sure I could do that, I'm so strong, so well. All girls are not large and strong as I am, auntie, and I love to take care of weak, helpless things, you know. I could do it. Don't you think so?"

Miss Brainard gazed at the girl with eyes alert and head erect, in profound astonishment at first; then, as it dawned upon her, signs of

approval appeared in her face; her head nodded assent more than once.

"It 's well to gauge yourself correctly, and I believe you could. Yes, Maggie, I believe you would make just as capable, self-sacrificing a nurse as they have ever turned out of their classes."

"Do you? do you, auntie? May I try? Oh are you willing?"

"Yes, I think I am. I believe I shall be proud of you. If there 's one trait I admire above another in woman, it 's capability. I think you have it, and plenty of common sense to tell you what you can't do, and to be able to stop when you reach the limit. Yes, you 'll make a good nurse, and I 'm not sure but I 'd like to be your first patient." She looked with entire satisfaction upon the eager girl.

"Oh, auntie, you precious woman! I hope you 'll never be sick, never."

"Just be translated without any fuss, h-m."

"Then I can do it. You are willing? Oh thank you, thank you! I 'll tell Becky this instant."

She danced out of the room into the pantry, startling the dame of all work with her jubilant exclamations.

"What 's up now, that you are turning a summersault in an oyster shell? as miss says."

"I 'm going to do it! I 'm going to do it!"

Becky stood, inquiringly smiling, with spoon in hand.

"Learn nursing, Becky. I 'm going to work."

"I never yet saw you idle. You 'll not leave the home?" with a searching glance.

"Yes, Becky, for a little. I 'm so glad! so glad!"

"Glad, ye are? Ungrateful! Take shame to yourself to say it. You 'll be breaking the heart o' miss."

"No, indeed; auntie 's as glad as I."

"It 's beyond me; I 'd die sooner than leave her. But there 's a difference in make. Well, if you rejoice to go, I 'll try and say good riddance; but it 's against nature." Her trembling voice brought Maggie to her senses.

"Let me explain, Becky. It 's all for the best."

She told her hopes, desires, and plans in a plain, straightforward manner that enlightened the good creature and satisfied her sense of justice.

"I 've thought of it, Becky, ever since last year, when we all took flowers one Sunday to the hospital and Dot sang for the patients. I never heard her sing so sweetly. They seemed to forget their pain. I talked with a young nurse; she was in the children's ward. Oh,

Becky, the little pinched faces! your heart would break to see them. She was smaller than I; she told me all about her work. I could do it. I 'm stronger than she, Becky; look at my muscle," baring her arm. "She had no such arm; and when I think of those poor little sufferers, I thank God for the strength he has given me."

Becky gazed with admiration upon the splendid proportions of the country girl.

"Yes, you could do it. It will be worth living for, after all. God speed you, child; but you gave me a turn—that you did."

"Turn again then, Becky. Come to the porch. Oh how lovely! Auntie! auntie! look out the west window," she called through the open door, and followed Becky outside.

"I 'm thinking heaven smiles at yer going, honey," said the woman softly.

They looked beyond the meadows, with here and there patches of unmelted snow, beyond the low willows that lined the river banks, across and far over the distant hills, purple and dim with the coming twilight, into a sea of blazing gold crossed by bars of vivid crimson, flecked with soft gray clouds, all reflected in the broad flowing river. They stood silently until the glory dimmed, a rapt expression on Maggie's earnest face. Becky's reverent voice broke the silence.

"If it 's so beautiful yon, what must it be beyond yon?"

"Oh, Becky! if we could only know!"

"Be patient, lassie. In His own time we shall; and if His voice calls you to that work, He 'll speed and bring you into a large place. Only trust Him."

"Yes, Becky," with an accent of sweet humility, at variance with her usual exultant ring. The woman was keen. She saw the young girl's spirit had been moved by a voice higher than her own, keyed as it was upon a life of trust.

There was no delay in the matter of preparation. If there was anything to do, Miss Clarissa's active energies were all at work. The first thing was to make application; the next to be prepared for the change, if accepted. Maggie proved successful. She was exultant. And now her life-work was chosen and would soon begin. The family approved; Uncle Eric's "Well done, Maggie!" was commendation enough to bring a flush of pleasure to her face.

Dot gave her uncle no peace until he appointed the first pleasant Saturday for their ride. As soon as the roads were smooth and dry he promised the trial trip.

Dot had harried, cajoled, and kissed her father into a willingness to purchase the tricycle; and abounding as she did in pleasant faults, she

presented from that moment her sweetest traits to the family view.

"Next Saturday, then, uncle, we'll go way out into the country."

"If pleasant. Fix up trim and taut. We don't want any ribbons flying. Follow Clare's example in dress, Dot."

"The idea, Uncle Eric! Just as though I had n't sense. I'll look like a nun, every curl plastered tight. But oh-h I'll fly for once."

"Uncle, can Jack go?" asked Clare.

"Of course; he can help you. Dot will need me to keep her within bounds."

"I'll run you a race for that, uncle; but why can't Bab go too?"

"Nothing to ride on. I wish she could," said Clare.

"Jack could hire a wheel for her; the more the merrier."

"Splendid!"

Saturday morning could not have been finer; a clear sky, fair travelling, and warm enough for a certain amount of exercise to make it perfect. Barbara was overjoyed to be included, and every window in the neighborhood had interested onlookers as they gathered in front of the Hamlin grounds, mounted, and rode gayly off.

They passed Barbara's home and the new block upon which her father was at work.

"There 's father; I 'll whistle," and catching up the toy she blew a shrill note or two. Mr. Allen's face beamed with appreciative satisfaction; he waved his cap in air as they flew by, Bab leaving a glad smile with him.

On they went, beyond the city, reaching the near woods and taking an old turnpike road that looked smooth and level, branching away from the more untravelled one that wound about the base of the hill, where they often went for flowers.

"See that horrid-looking old woman, uncle. Where could she come from?" asked Dot.

"The same old body that haunts the rubbish barrels of the school-yard," replied Jack.

"I often see her about the city; every one who walks the streets is familiar with the sight, I judge. She 's a character. I should like to know her history. Been gathering coals from the heap yonder," responded Mr. Hamlin.

"What a life, uncle! I pity her."

"Yes, Clare; it looks hard to us. It may not be all misery to her, however."

"A race, Dot, a race!" Jack sped along, followed closely by Dot and Bab. There was no time for sentiment. They left that for Uncle Eric and his beloved pupil.

It was a grand run between the three. Dot meant to be victorious. Her perfect fearlessness, the buoyant spring of her nature, her ready con-

trol of every muscle, made this exercise an exquisite pleasure from the very first.

"Oh I could shout and sing!" she cried.

"What 's to hinder?" asked Jack.

"Words, only words. If I was like Bab I 'd make them and sing them from dawn to dark."

"Give her a song, Barbara."

A flush spread over Barbara's face, a light crept into her brown eyes; she wheeled nearer Dot's side and half sung, half recited the thought that came with the moment:

"Into the vast unknown,
Under the morning skies,
Out where the diamond dew
Thick on the meadow lies;
Fresh, swift, and strong upborne,
Like birds in eager flight,
On through the fragrant dawn,
On through the rosy light;
So do our spirits soar
Far up and far away,
Into the vast unknown,
Into the promised day."

"Bab, I can't remember, sing it again."

"I could n't, Dot." The flush died away, the enthusiasm fled, and Barbara checked her wheel, fell back, and joined the others.

"Does she often do that, Dot?"

"Oh, Jack, she 's full of it; that is, when she feels like it. I wish her father was rich; she has such a fine voice."

"Rich! He is."

Jack looked as though any father ought to be satisfied with such a fortune.

The strange figure which had attracted their notice was shuffling along from the hill road towards the city. Not a word or look did she vouchsafe them; quickly she tramped into the bustling thoroughfare, her sharp, black eyes peering into every hole and corner, every refuse barrel of odds and ends, her face turned towards every receptacle for rubbish the city afforded. More than once a day the old gunny-bag on her back was filled to overflowing with the sweepings of store or house, and deposited in safety; not a box cover or a yard of string, empty bottle or unmatched shoe, escaped her. What eventually became of the medley was a conjecture. Apparently she had no other means of support. Her garments were far from comfortable or tidy; an old, dingy hood tied over straggling gray locks, a shawl, worn to netting, crossed in front and knotted at the back, shoes not always mates and never whole, and hands like claws, capable of intruding anywhere.

Barbara had noticed her pass to the ash-heaps beyond; the business men had become accustomed to her bustling from one point to another, absorbed and eager, as though she had a world in herself. Some guessed that many a missing

article had been hopelessly swallowed by the gaping sack, but as she quietly attended to her affairs she was unmolested. If the city protectors knew more of her history they made no sign. In larger cities such characters were common, but here she was alone. She had the field to herself.

Far into the country the riders went. Dot declared it too lovely for words to describe, and she meant some day to go to Aunt Clarissa's and take her by surprise.

"Do you think we could, uncle?" with a quick bird-like motion of the head peculiar to her.

"Yes, after a little practice. It 's a fairly level country. I could leave you there for the night; to return the same day would be rather too much."

"Let 's go Friday, Clare. Bab could n't go; but you could, Jack."

"Whoop! Yes. What a scheme!"

Jack knew it would not fall through if Dot took hold of it.

Their short daily rides were eagerly anticipated. Often they halted at M.. Allen's door, one or the other of the sisters waiting for their little friend to take a turn. Clare's pleasure was enhanced if Barbara shared it. Their friendship was a pure delight to both and beautiful to those who watched its growth.

One day not long after Miss Brainard and Maggie heard an unusual sound of prolonged whistling that drew them to the door.

"What is it, auntie? I should think it was a collision if the road was this side of the river. It 's too near for steam." She ran to the door.

"It 's a party of bicycle-riders, auntie. Come, there are ladies! How pretty! Do hear them whistle! They are trying to make all the noise they can. Do look at the neighbors. They 've roused the street!"

"That 's Eric, Maggie; I know the cant of his head."

"It is, auntie, it is! And Clare and Dot and Jack, as I live, auntie. What a jollification!"

"Run and open the gate, child."

Maggie bounded over the gravel walk under the great swaying elms, threw the gate wide open, and with a broad smile of welcome clapped her hands with the vim she put into everything.

"This is delightful, Eric. Jack, I 'm glad to see you. How gay you look, girls! What possessed you? This is unique! I like it!"

Miss Brainard led them into the house, Dot clinging to her.

"We 've all come to tea, auntie. Clare and I have got to stay till Monday. Uncle wont let

us go back to-night. I could do it, but I 'd rather stay."

"And I 'd rather you would, chick. Ten miles is a stretch, isn't it, Eric?"

"Not for me, but plenty for the girls."

"I should think so. You and Jack had better spend the night and start fresh in the morning."

"No, Clarissa, we 'll take a bite with you and a quick run home by moonlight. Jack and Burr will come up early Monday and bring the girls home."

"Auntie, we 've brought a devouring appetite! I 'm starved."

"I think Becky can satisfy even you, pet. We 'll have supper soon; meantime Maggie will get a pitcher of milk."

"Safe for Maggie or I shall take a bite out of her round cheek," shaking her playfully.

"You little cannibal! let me get it then quickly."

"I 'll go with you. Becky 'll need me to stir her up."

Very soon they were invited to do justice to the appetizing dishes Becky had prepared at short notice. It was a mystery to those who depended upon a neighboring market in such an emergency to understand the resources of the country home or the quick skill of its head.

Dot made the discovery. Her curious eyes followed Becky to the chicken-coop, saw the dexterous swing she gave the heads of the fat pullets and the rapid stripping of the feathers, the quick disjointing of the tender bones and the careful broiling, exclaiming when the grand climax was reached,

"Well, Becky, you did that just splendidly. How good it looks! I believe you could manage a bicycle as well as I do."

Becky shook with merriment. "The Lord preserve me. My legs will do for me this many a day yet."

The table was soon loaded, a great dish of Saratoga fries, crisp rolls, hot coffee, and plenty of the dainties Aunt Clarissa always kept on hand. A merry hour followed, and just as the great round moon began its journey, the gentlemen started home.

As spring advanced and the last snow-drift melted and disappeared, every boy far and near anticipated the coming of the grand show of the year. Already the great flaming posters were placed in every available position to attract attention. The grand menagerie was coming. About every showy placard crowds of boys gathered, eager for information, seriously studying the enticing pictures, delighting in the gor-

geous golden boat representing Cleopatra floating on the Nile, or envying the wonderful driver of the forty prancing horses, absorbed in the animals from all parts of the world—the massive elephant, the giraffe, the zebra, lions, tigers, and monkeys all making for the schoolboy a delightful lesson in natural history.

The whole city was astir. Schools were to be dismissed; each and all determined to get every atom of pleasure from the first coming of this wonderful show through all its many phases, its entrance into the city, its famous street parade, its performances, even to the last packing of tents and the midnight departure. Then the scenes that should be reënacted on many a playground, the blissful glory of the average boy, the terror of the over-anxious mothers! Jack, Burr, and his two younger brothers were early on the spot. The youngest and dearest, Etta said, must be satisfied to watch the parade from the window. Hale was six years old, a handsome little fellow, quick as a flash, ready of speech, having had his wits sharpened upon those of his lively brothers and the free-spoken Etta.

"I 'll take Hale with me, mother. I 'm going to Nellie's; she has her little cousin May there. He 'll have a nice time with her, watching the parade from the balcony, and for one

day you 'll get a good rest from the noise of us all."

The girls were still friendly. Etta was not easily shaken off; and after the first passion Nellie was glad to have one schoolmate in whom she could confide, even if she did not receive the sympathy she looked for.

Other friends flocked to the house and the two little ones were given a corner of the balcony, and after a while they became absorbed in a box of toys, making no trouble for the girls chatting together in one and another room of the elegant home. They noticed the children enough to see they were happy.

The grand car with its gorgeous trappings was coming and the street was soon filled with spectators. Every boy in the city tramped within sight of the brilliant spectacle; every foot of pavement was covered by the moving crowd, every window near filled with bright, gay faces.

"Is it nice, Hale?" Etta asked.

"Oh my, sister! Just look!"

She was satisfied. He was happy. With a pat and smile she turned away and became absorbed in the bright chatter of the gay girls. Little May's mother below with Mrs. Miller had no anxiety; Nellie was fond of her cousin and watched her patiently and lovingly.

They crouched in their cosey corner, looking through the curved bars of the railing, hand in hand, eyes wide with wonder, until the last object of the scene passed from view.

"Come, May, I want to see more, don't you?"

"Yes, more too."

"Well, come on. I know the way out. Let's go to the gate; come."

They sped through the window and room beyond, over the stairs, and through a side door leading to the gate. Once on the walk, curiosity was irresistible. Hale held the child's hand and drew her to the corner and on farther and farther after the inspiring music. They laughed gleefully, delighted with this strange, new freedom. And on they went until the many turns had bewildered Hale. He was lost.

But what a glorious time they were having! How the fresh air blew May's curls over her eyes. How bravely Hale drew her across the streets, sometimes under the very nose of a lumbering horse. How they laughed and frolicked, making friends with every dog that passed them.

But oh! that dreadful day to Etta and Nellie, by whom the two children were soon missed and sought for in vain. No tongue could portray Etta's terror. She dared not go home.

For hours she flew from street to street with Nellie, while Mrs. Miller with May's mother scoured the city in the carriage. Detectives were employed, every available help made use of, and at last in utter despair Nellie went home and Etta sought her father.

He was not always a patient man.

"Why did you not come to me at once?"

"Don't, father! I can't bear it."

She was shaking as with ague, her very lips white with fear and weariness, her tearless eyes looking into his with pleading agony. He saw that she was suffering.

"There, there, don't fret so, Ettie. They 'll be found easily, no doubt. I 'll go to the police, then to the menagerie, and you go home. Upon my word, but Hale 's beginning early. Tell mother carefully. No need to worry. I 'll find them."

The reaction came; her terrible burden had fallen upon one better able to lift it, and taking a car she was soon in her mother's presence.

How they endured the following hours they never knew. To Etta it was a blank. She was unnerved; for the first time in her life she lost consciousness, and it was well for the mother to have some one to care for and think of beside her lost boy. Ettie had been a loving, patient sister to the four brothers: Burr, two years older, Wal-

lace and Robin her playfellows, and the "baby," a pet name which disgusted him at all hours but bedtime, when his delight was to be held and rocked by his admiring sister until her impossible tales sent him happy into dreamland. Would she ever again have him in her arms? Would that loved voice with its clear, high ring ever again ask for one more story, "About bears this time, sister"? Had her tales of animal life helped to draw him off? Would he ever be found? Who could harm the sweet, brave boy? How could her father find him in that throng of people? And if they should be trampled! "Oh! dear God, help us!" she cried at last, throwing herself on her knees and burying her face in her mother's lap.

It was late before the father came. He had found Burr and Jack. They were still searching. The police were watching every person connected with the great show. Every train leaving the city was inspected. Mr. Miller and Etta's father consulted, offered rewards, never ceased their efforts until the night was spent. The mothers agonized and prayed, but no tidings reached them that night.

Jack stopped at Mr. Hamlin's, leaving his reasons for absence from his classes and giving them the painful tidings of unsuccessful search. Then with his pony and Burr he would scour

the country round until the children were found.

Etta gave up at last. Hope had died. Clare begged to see her, but found no words could comfort or help.

The next morning dawned brightly. As usual Barbara was up with the sun; her morning duties accomplished, the simple breakfast over, her blithe voice rang out in a joyous strain as she hurried the work that an hour might be gained for the woods. The earliest blossoms tempted her. She knew just where to find them, and with her basket she started, gained the lane by a short cut, and reached the woods.

She went aside from the usual path, lured on by the flowers that seemed to have sprung up in a night, and before she was aware she was close to the river—in quite another part of the city and far from her home. Miserable huts clustered upon the flats, and beyond them the railroad with its smoke and din confused her. It would be too far to return the way she had come; she would certainly be late for school. The quickest way would be to go through this dirty settlement and find the nearest point for home. It was still early; a few Italian venders were starting for the day's work. They threw sharp glances towards her, but she pushed on over the uneven ground. Another cluster of huts, near

the railroad, farther from the river, caught her eye. As she drew near a sharp cry startled her. It came from the farthest shanty:

"Mamma, mamma! Take me home! Mamma!"

Surely she knew that voice! What impulse made her bound over the ties, boards, and *debris* until she gained the door of the old hut and with all her force pushed it open and rushed in? An angel of mercy must have guided her fearless steps.

An old rag-picker, awakened by the child's cries, was sitting on the edge of a filthy-looking mattress, her sharp eyes fixed upon the terrified boy. A little girl was just rousing from sleep beside her.

"Why, Hale! How came you here?"

"Barby, Barby!" he shrieked and flew into her arms, clasping her with frantic strength.

"How came he here?" She looked at the woman fearlessly, hideous as she appeared.

"The brats were lost. I lugged 'em here. What could I do? leave 'em in the street? They 've had no hurt."

"Who is the little girl, Hale?"

He was sobbing convulsively; he could not speak.

"Poor baby, don't cry so! Barby will take you home. Been here all night? What must

they have suffered! Have you been good to them? His father will reward you if you have."

"Good? Yes, very good. He did not cry till now. I suppose he's hungry, a little. I take good care of them. Nice girl this."

"Who is the little girl, Hale? Did she come with you?"

"Yes. We went to see the el'phant. It's May. The woman made us come. Oh, Barby, take me home."

"I will, darling. Barby will take you and May too. Come right along; come to Barby's house and get some milk; then we'll get in the cars and go to mamma." She wiped his tears, smoothed the tangled curls of the little girl, who was hardly awake, and told the woman her friends would certainly reward her, then took a hand of each and led them up the rough way to the winding, dewy road. The eyes that followed her glittered with avarice, but Barbara saw no reason to distrust her.

She laughed with the children and ran along the roadway merrily until the boy's heart grew lighter. Reaching at length her own home, she waited long enough to refresh them with a tumbler of milk. Then getting into a car she went to Etta's.

The boy shrieked with an overflow of joy as he found his mother's and sister's arms clasping him.

"My precious boy! My baby!" exclaimed Etta's mother. "I must take May at once. Oh, Hale!"

"I will take her, Etta. Where to? The darling has n't whimpered."

"Pooh! she 's too sleepy," said Hale. "She 's only a girl. Her feet would n't go. The horrid old woman had to carry her. She said we were coming home."

The mother could not speak. She folded Barbara tightly in her arms and with quivering lips pointed to the little girl. She knew the agony of the other mother.

"I wish you would, dear Babette. She 's Nellie's little cousin; only a few steps, and they are suffering."

She went at once, stopped at the door long enough to explain to Mr. Miller, who had been up all night, and turned to leave.

"Come in, come in and tell my wife, and let us know to whom we are indebted."

"I have told you all, Mr. Miller. Excuse me, I must go to school. Nellie knows me. I am Barbara Allen."

"Barbara Allen, yes, a friend of Nellie's. I 've heard the name. You 're a brave girl to beard the lion in his den. Upon my word, it was well done; the reward is yours, and our thanks beside."

"No, no, I have done nothing. It was the woman who found them. I will accept nothing, Mr. Miller. I am too happy to have brought them home."

He explained to his wife and daughter and little May's mother, who was exhausted with grief.

"A beautiful girl, Nellie, a friend of yours, Barbara Allen, found her."

"Papa! Barbara Allen!"

"Yes, a royal nature. How it shone out when she said she would accept nothing. I felt as though I had wronged her to speak of reward. I 'm glad you have such a friend, Nell."

Something was given the woman that more than satisfied her. The police were doubtful about her object, but as the children had received no harm, she was allowed to go her way unmolested.

Nellie had the grace to give Barbara a few words of gushing thanks when they met, but not her companionship. Ah no, she could not quite descend to that.

Etta's noble nature bestowed upon her humble friend the grateful love of a whole life. Nothing could exceed the gratitude of the family.

CHAPTER XI.

LIFE AT THE SOUTH.

OUR pioneers had passed safely the hottest months of their first year in Florida. Mrs. Brainard with the younger children was still in Jacksonville, while her husband and Ned were carrying on the work bravely that was eventually to give them all a home together. The proprietor of the estate they were working was abundantly satisfied with their success, and they anticipated the labor of another year with renewed courage.

The lonely life was depressing to both. The midday heat was at first to Ned almost unbearable. During this season of acclimatizing his discomforts were magnified. He had never dreamed of insect life in such profusion. He said, "Between red-bugs and bed-bugs, mosquitoes and sand-flies, gnats and jiggers, life is a torment."

The more patient father laughed him speedily back to good-nature, but he declared the pests were too much for him. More agreeable were the moths and butterflies that abounded in the brightest colors and most fanciful markings.

This first summer was wearily long. He envied the light-hearted negro who worked so cheerily beneath the powerful rays of the sun, whose jolly song and rollicking laugh could be heard any time in the day. The temperature, high by day and cooler at night, so inspiring to those dark children of the South, proved during the hottest weeks too much for his courage and vigor. He must give up his Northern habits of constant and steady exercise and follow those of the people he was among, who labor comfortably early and late, enjoying mid-day as the hour of the siesta.

He missed his mother and all the sweet companionships of the North. The arrival of the evening mail was their brightest hour of the twenty-four. He watched eagerly for the young negro, who would gallop up to the porch in mad fashion, fling himself from the bare-back horse, and with a sympathetic grin fling the bag of letters at their feet.

"Mighty heaby mail done bring dis time. Reckon massa hab good news sho now."

"All right, Pete. Thanks. Take good care of the pony and get your supper."

"Yessir." With a fling he was on the animal again and off to the negro quarters, from whence the sound of laugh and song reached them until the time for sleep.

There was for sale near this place a snug plot of partly cultivated land which father and son had thought of as a possible home for the family. There was around the buildings what was called an old cracker grove, made up of a few very choice varieties of native sweet orange and some of the bitter orange, with a few budded trees. There were guavas in plenty, and in one corner a group of cocoanuts, their stipes surmounted by a crown of graceful tapering leaves outlined against the sky. Ned thought some ambitious householder had made plans that he failed to carry out. A medley of other fruits were doing as well as they could with no care, the more vigorous, by pushing and crowding, killing off the feebler stock. Ned longed to take hold of the little place and bring order out of chaos.

A long one-story shanty faced the lake, some distance from it and with a gradual rise of several feet. It had a rough, uncultivated look, but presented to Ned just the one available spot to harbor his precious mother. He knew it could be made habitable, and was she not pleading in every letter to be allowed to share their discomforts, privation, and labor? At last she wrote that she was almost tempted to come without notice and take them by surprise.

By his own unutterable longings the boy knew his mother's heart, and that evening, as

they turned over the mail-bag together on the porch, with the short, glorious sunset flooding them, he exclaimed almost irritably,

"I do n't believe it 's hotter here than on that river, father! We have the lakes all round us and a strong gulf breeze. I wish they *could* come now. It 's two-thirds of a year already."

"I know. If I had a home I would not wait a day. There 's no prettier spot than that deserted place, Ned, by the lake. I could get it for a song, if I thought she 'd be happy."

"Happy! She 's not happy now way off there. She 'd call it blissful. *We 've* got to stay. I 'm sure we 've had enough of native society. I could endure everything with her."

"I want to do my best for her, my boy."

"Of course. So do I. And I think we could make a little paradise of this place. There are trees enough to make a fine start now. Put a few sweet buds into some of those sour trees and in three or four years your crop is sure. Then those old limes are worth all they 'd ask for the whole. I 've lived on them all summer. And look at the guavas and lemons; think what they 'd come to with decent care. The whole thing is running to waste. It would pay to buy it if we only stayed five years. Oh, father, let 's do it and send for mother! I want her." His voice trembled.

"So do I, Ned. Well, I must have one night to think it over."

"That sounds like Aunt Clarissa. Soon as you decide I 'll set to work. Give me two able-bodied boys and I 'll turn things inside out in a jiffy."

"Slow, Ned, slow. Summer has n't left yet."

"Long enough about it. Guess I 'll take a look at the shanty, father, and make my plans. I do n't believe you 'll go back on me now."

With a spring and a bound he was out of sight in the midst of tropical verdure and bloom. There was time but for a brief look before the short twilight paled into sudden darkness. After a plunge into the lake, as his habit was, he was soon dreaming of the glad reunion.

If it had been a tedious summer for the workers, it had been no less dreary for the one who waited. It seemed to her those torrid months would never drag their weary length along. The almost daily showers were some compensation. She watched for the first breath that scattered the shafts of fierce heat and roused the almost pulseless stillness of midday into action. The first whispers among the tall pines that told of the approach of the welcome daily visitant she heeded, and loved to swing idly in the hammock watching the wonderful cloud-pictures, varying every moment, that covered

the heavens. Sometimes it looked to her like a great battlefield, with armies marshalled in grand array, immense forces drawn up for battle or scattered and flying in confused disorder. She had never before seen such skies, such clouds.

But after all the strangeness would not wear off; she missed the two so far away, so seldom seen. A few new friends were kind, though none could fill her life but the absent ones; and should harm come to them, should they be taken from her, all brightness would be blotted out for ever. She would undergo any hardship, make any sacrifice, to be with them again.

Early in youth she had lost her parents and an only brother. After years of a lonely, uncared-for life she had married. Since then her days had been crowned with the highest happiness. This was her first trial. She thought it had lasted long. She was almost as impatient as Ned; and even as she wearied herself with complaints the tidings she longed for were on the way. A letter from the North, with a check inclosed for immediate use, reached her. Clarissa urged her to supply herself with every comfort needed. If any necessity was wanting, send her word at once; she was aching to fill barrels, as the churches did for missionaries, and forward to her.

Right upon this characteristic epistle came word from her husband to be ready to return with him the following week. They had purchased a spot where she could camp out, if she preferred it to the more comfortable quarters she then occupied. He could only promise her the joy of being together. He well knew she desired no other. It was, he said, a rough pioneer life, independent enough to suit the most radical freeman, and she could make it as arcadian and sylvan as she liked. This was the brightest hour she had known since they had left her, and they might appear at any moment, for both were coming for a short rest. Indeed, Ned rebelled at the very thought of being there alone.

No brighter day had ever dawned for her than that which brought them once more into her daily life. How they had changed! Ruddy and brown with the glow of health, jubilant in view of once more making a home for all together, and almost too happy for speech in this blissful meeting!

"We 'll pack and move once more, little woman; but it does n't look so uncertain this time as it did by a good deal. I hope it will suit you, sweetheart."

"Suit me, Harry! I can endure anything if we may be together, with our children. I 'm

ready to call any place *home* and make it the dearest spot on earth."

"You 'll do it, mother. With your taste and my strength we 'll transform the place. Auntie sent me in her last letter enough to buy a boat, and you shall soon ride on the lake in fine style. The ladies there make their calls in that way. There are landings at all the fine residences. Unfortunately there is but one other residence on the shore of our tiny lake. It belongs to a physician, who is there for his health and employs himself in raising chickens. He has the biggest hennery in the country and raises an immense number of eggs. I 'm bound to get acquainted with him when he comes down."

"I say, Ned, I 'll fish every day. Wont it be immense!"

"Yes, Hal, you 'll have to provide for the table. It wont do for a great fellow like you to come up in idleness."

"What have you done at school?" asked his father.

"As much as I could, sir. How can a fellow plod over his books with the thermometer way up in the nineties? I 'd like to see Ned do it. But I 've taught Kitty to read."

"That 's brave! She 'll be a famous scholar some day, our little flower blossoming in the jungle."

The father held her close, while she nestled delightedly in his arms with the liveliest satisfaction.

"Take plenty of books, Lucy. You must expect to be lonely. I want you to be happy; if not, I shall pack you off North at short notice."

"Never fear. We shall be together. It has been long to wait. I shall forget it now;" and she looked into his dear eyes and bronzed face with entire content.

They were ready in a few days, with abundant stores for the winter.

The cars took them nearly all the way. They enjoyed every mile. The country grew more and more strange and wild. As they passed along near one of the larger lakes they startled a big crocodile on one side the road and a flock of wild turkeys on the other. Tracts of burnt pine woods, with the tall black stumps still standing, met them, while here and there a scene of picturesque beauty and peaceful home-life caused them to desire the end of the wearisome journey. Then there was a half-day's ride in a lumbering mule-cart through pine stretches, along sandy paths, with here and there a little settlement, or a lone log-cabin, where the sunburned babies revelled in the dry leaves or basked in the glaring daylight.

It was a wild, unfamiliar country, with occa-

sional spots of rare loveliness, and always the clear, beautiful sky above them. The mules travelled slowly. The driver, black as night, drove lazily, sometimes throwing upon the quiet a low musical note and quaint words that filled Harry with merriment. He walked with his brother for miles, and Kitty was allowed to run over the path at her pleasure.

They reached the lake region; each scene seemed more charming than the last, bordered with luxuriant growth, with occasional clearings in a rich state of cultivation, and sometimes bringing to view a fine winter residence waiting the return of its owner. As they passed one very attractive place, its broad verandas inclosed in wire netting, guarding the occupants effectually from the insect life of the country, in the midst of wonderful blooms and products of vines and shade trees and groves of fruit, Mrs. Brainard said,

"I suppose our home is more primitive, Ned?"

"For the present, yes; but the site is just as fine, mother; and if we don't make it blissful, I 'm mistaken."

"I 'll trust you, my boy. I 'm eager to see it."

"It 's pretty rough now, but as clean as paint and whitewash can make it; and we 've got the jolliest old colored 'auntie' to wait on you and do the work."

She laughed gleefully. It was refreshing to be cared for, to have the burden lifted.

Mr. Brainard lost some of his cheerfulness as they drew near the end. He was in doubt about the little woman's being able to rough it, as he and Ned had done. He dreaded to bring her to a life of hardship. She saw his doubt, and kept up a lively chat with Ned and the children and sometimes a word with the solemn-faced driver.

"I suppose you have a family. How many children have you?"

"A right smart lot, and the ole woman."

"You work for Mr. Brainard?"

"Yes, missy. I 's druv dese mules goin' on ten year, drawin' out de stumps and breakin' up de lan'."

"It must be hard to open new places and cultivate them."

"Mighty hard, missy, to use de grubbin' hoe an' de axe; but it pays like."

"You have a good span of mules."

"I 's druv dese mules nigh on ten year. Dey knows jist all I think; dey 's powerful knowin' critters. Dere 's Sam, now, got a pair o' mules dat take all de 'ligion out of him. He says a fellow dat drives mules has no use for 'ligion; but my mules knows I 's got plenty of 'ligion; dey do n't make me swear, neber."

Again they wound through the pines, over stumps, wherever a team had gone before; and about an hour before sunset they turned the slow mules from the pine path into a more travelled road within private grounds. They followed a winding path, hedged with magnolias and an abundance of rose-bushes of many varieties; tall water-oaks rose on each side. After a ride of a quarter of a mile negro cabins appeared, from which tumbled a medley of black youngsters of all ages, among a pack of baying dogs, to greet them. Here were large tracts laid out in well cultivated beds of various vegetables and small fruits. Now they drove through a large orange grove, with some of the last year's fruit still hanging.

"Can I have some, Ned?" shouted Harry.

"As many as you like," he answered, calling to the boys to come along and open and close the gates after them. Then by a huge clump of cabbage palmettoes they passed through the last gate, leaving a half-dozen grinning boys astride it, eagerly watching them out of sight.

Now they drove into what seemed to Mrs. Brainard a dense jungle of roots, trees, hanging moss, and dank, wild growth that was almost impassable. The rays of light that had flecked through the pines were shut out, and the gloom was chilling.

"Only a few rods further, dear," said Mr. Brainard.

She looked eagerly into the dusk, waiting for a first sight of the strange home. How her heart fluttered with fear and hope. How tightly she pressed Kitty to her, trembling with the strange excitement of this rough ride. At last they emerged into an open space; before them gleamed a small sheet of water, with a point of land extending into it. The clouds above were glowing with sunset hues, and the water reflected every shade and form. Birds strange to her dipped to the surface and soared away—the red flamingo, long-legged heron, and crane. Beautiful song-birds darted here and there fearlessly, pouring such a volume of melody as to make the place seem enchanted. A smooth, green surface fell back from the yellow sand of the curving beach which stretched along from the point; the rest of the lake was edged with tall grass ferns and the feathery pampas, which extended to the garden on one side and the hummock on the other.

Facing the west was a long, low, roughly-built cabin, raised about two feet from the sand, with a rude veranda along the front, and surrounded by a coarse Bermuda grass pushing through the dun soil. On one side Ned had inclosed a piece for the winter garden. All about

were old orange-trees, lemons, and limes; under one of the former, and near the house, was a well of the purest water.

It had a peaceful look to her tired eyes with all its strangeness, and as her husband lifted her from the cart she dropped her head an instant on his shoulder, saying,

"Harry, it is delightful!"

"There, father, I had better faith than you; I knew the little mother would like it. Come right in. Halloa, auntie, all ready for us, are n't you?"

"Yes, honey. De coffee just done biled, an' de hoe-cake mighty hot. Bless you, missy, yer clean done up, sho."

How happy they were! How the children revelled in the home-coming; even the father's voice had a boyish ring as they drew round the pine table to partake of auntie's good cheer, while she, her broad black face shining under her colored kerchief, stood with hands reverently folded as the blessing upon this first meal was asked.

Not much sight-seeing for them that night. They were all tired enough for a long, sound sleep. In the morning work began with vigor.

"Take it easy, Lucy. Don't try to do it all in a day. We've got all the time there is. Auntie 'll do it; she 's used to it."

"Yes, chile, I 's gwine to tak de burdensome part; you keep in dat ole cheer an' gib directions. I can do a powerful heap o' work."

To the happy mother it was a charming picnic, to be prolonged indefinitely, with nothing familiar but the faces she loved.

How grand and strong and capable Ned and his father looked in their rough clothes! How their experience made every obstacle disappear, smoothed all the roughness away.

"And this is the way you have lived here alone?"

Ned laughed.

"Not half as stylish, mother. Part the time we 've taken our grub in our fists and eaten anyhow."

"Ned! Ned! Do you talk like that in this wilderness?"

"I wont, now that we shall feel more like civilized beings; but I 've felt as though I was degenerating."

"I 've come none too soon, dear boy; we came here to gain, not to lose."

"I know; I 'll remember. There 's something now worth trying for."

The main entrance was into a long room, extending from a front veranda to a large square latticed porch on the back of the house; it was lighted only from the large rooms on each side

and the doors at each end, always open; it was used as hall, sitting-room, and dining-room. Indeed, it was the cheeriest spot in the house, and always in the evenings the social centre of the home would be about the table in that room.

The kitchen was separated by an open space, all under one roof, with a large pantry between it and the main house, the storeroom being an immense dry goods box fitted with shelves, the skeleton door covered with strong wire netting and padlocked, as it stood outside upon the unguarded porch.

Close by was the well, and across the porch, back of the side room, north and connecting with it, were two sleeping-rooms; the large room on the other side of the hall was Mrs. Brainard's, a cot for Kitty beside her own.

"Make your plans, mother; take plenty of time; it's the cheapest thing in Florida. I'll be the boss carpenter and carry out your orders to the letter. A wardrobe in this corner; that old chest of drawers that father fretted about bringing will go in the middle room."

"Yes, for table and bed linen."

"Capital. You see I've stained the floors, and as soon as you unpack we'll down with some rugs and make a little gem of a place. Bring out your table covers and curtains and pictures and bric-a-brac, and let's feel at home."

"Dear boy, how you have missed the home. I brought but few pretty things. You shall have the benefit of all I have. Can Kitty get into mischief?"

"She had better keep clear of the lake."

"Find her, do; we will have a fair understanding from the first."

It was a delightfully bustling day, and before night the unpacking was accomplished, for everything had reached there before the family. Curtains were up, rugs placed, dishes in order, and the rooms having a homelike air that was simply refreshing.

For many days the sound of Ned's saw and hammer could be heard as he added one and another convenience to the place. The rafters, which had never been concealed in any of the rooms, he covered with a thin, pale gray cloth, giving the appearance of a well finished wall. At the top and bottom of this he stretched a half breadth of a slightly contrasting color, while the low ceiling was covered with white, firmly tacked to the sides; nothing could have finished the room more daintily.

"There, mother, are your frieze and dado; now we 'll get up the pictures and dream we 're back at the North."

With a few boards he put together and stained a set of shelves for the books, before

which the mother drew a pretty curtain. It was a charming room; they only regretted their friends could not share it with them. The children soon became friends with Aunty, and hung about watching her skill in the kitchen.

"How old is little missy?" she asked Harry.

"She 's five and I 'm thirteen. How old are you?"

"'Pears like I 's right smart ageable, honey. My children all done growed up and lef' de ole mammy alone now sho. Reckon you uns be my chilluns now; mus hab a swing ober yonder in de trees for you uns."

"Good! Ned 'll do it. Come, Kit, let 's find him and see about it." Already a hammock hung in the veranda, shaded by two large grown oleanders, and beyond was the shining foliage of the magnolia, a mass of verdure.

Ned promised himself to bring the place into a more orderly state in good time; just now he was showing his mother all its fine points, calling attention to its unlimited capacity, showing with pride his garden, surrounded with a closely built lathe fence, that the wild rabbits might not demolish everything. It was yet in embryo, but plainly promised grand results.

"See my strawberry bed; it looks well."

"Strawberries! Where 's the cream to come from?"

"We can get plenty of milk from the other place; the boys live on mush and milk."

"What about fresh meat? You have not been entirely without it, I hope."

"Indeed no; the lake furnishes fish, the woods game. We can get rabbit or quail any day. Then we have chickens, eggs, and the great resource of the South, canned meats in plenty. I shall break land at once, mother, for a young grove, and in a few years the place will be worth three times its cost."

It would be a long story to attempt the details of this pioneer life. Ned infected them all with his boundless enthusiasm. The father lost his careworn, troubled look. The mother called back some of the buoyant spirit of her girlhood, while Kitty ran among the luxuriant growth around them with as much delight and freedom as the wild rabbit that, at a safe distance, sat on its haunches and gazed curiously at her. For a time Harry was to mingle work and study at home with the help Ned could give him. He was looking forward, however, if they were prospered, to finishing off at Rollin's College, recently started at Winter Park.

CHAPTER XII.

JACK'S DISGRACE.

THE last year of school-life passed swiftly; our young friends had graduated with honor and were entering bravely upon active life.

Clare, with humility and patience coming only through the love that "suffereth long and is kind," was still praying and hoping for Nellie, striving to be a peacemaker on earth, exerting the influence of a life hid in Christ upon those she met in the daily walks of life. She had need of patience, charity, of generous forbearance, and all the divine help so freely bestowed upon those who labor for and with Christ, for had she not taken her stand fearlessly against jealousy, cruelty, and self-righteousness, those attributes of a loveless soul?

Barbara in the same humble style was caring for her father, who through her thrift was able to lay by a monthly sum for a possible emergency, and to give her a few lessons in the art she loved, painting in water colors. To this end they had rented the tiny room over the entrance, and dubbed it the studio. Its walls were soon covered with studies of all that the out-of-door

world supplied, and here Etta and Clare often met to watch her progress and encourage her efforts.

Etta's life was given to the home, lightening the mother's cares and watching over the pet of the whole family, her baby, as she called him, though nothing brought the indignant flush quicker to his cheek than to hear the older brothers call him Etta's baby. He was a brave, manly little fellow, and since the day, two years before, into which was concentrated all the suffering of her life Etta had hardly allowed him out of her sight. She was his body-guard and his jolly playfellow, the chief sympathizer of his small griefs, and his ready comforter when the elder brothers joked him too roughly. She treasured all his bright little speeches, repeated them to Clare and Barbara, took him with her always in her frequent calls upon her two friends.

"Come, Hale, let 's run out and see what Barby 's doing to-day," she called one morning.

"Yes, and we 'll talk. You 'll tell me the rest of the Wandering Jew, Etta."

"I told you that last time. We 'll take something else."

"Oh yes. Crusoe and his man Friday. I like that, and the footprints! Oh how it makes my watch tick in me," putting his hand over his heart.

She laughed at the funny conceit.

"Where's the Wandering Jew now, sister? Tell me just a little more about him."

"Oh, Hale, it's a fairy tale. There's no truth in it, you know."

"But I want it to be true. I don't like fairy tales. How do you know that the dear Jesus isn't a fairy tale, sister?"

Thus he startled her with his searching questions until her heart was touched, and the old, sweet story became still more a reality to her and the guide of her young life.

Nellie had overlooked Clare's offence and deigned to return Barbara's greeting when they met, which was rarely now that school-days were over. She was forced to respect one who persistently and grandly put duty first, and who would not be rewarded for doing right. The old intimacy between Clare and Nellie had never been renewed.

Nellie considered her education finished.

She had not comprehended that it might mean development of the whole woman, not the partial culture that warps the moral nature and stunts the physical growth.

The stream could not flow higher than the fountain; and her mother gave neither time nor thought to such old-fashioned subjects. She had trained her for a life of selfish gratification; and

at the rate she was speeding on, the goal would soon be reached. What then? She neither knew nor seemed to care.

Clare still followed her uncle's lead, and was doing thorough student work that won his highest commendation. Dot had entered the high-school, and danced through the hours as she always had.

Jack had been a year in college. Perhaps no one outside his home missed the genial fellow more than Miss Gray. He had never failed to give her a call when he came home. He was still her only visitor. She would have no other. He told his mother it was a fortunate tempest that opened the door to him. She heartily agreed with him and wished he might still be under her influence.

She feared for her easy-going boy away from home and the restraining power of the mother-love. Never strong, his affection for and tender care of her had exerted almost a healing power; but this separation had sapped her flagging energies and weakened her ability to resist. Every home-coming was anticipated with impatience, and every parting held a fresh and bitterer sting. Ah, if he should go wrong! If temptation should come to her boy, and she not by to help him stand firm! It would be more than she could bear.

And now Miss Gray's thoughts turned upon him. Why had he not been to see her when last in the city? Months had slipped by, and she had neither seen nor heard from him. The winter came and passed: she believed Jack had forgotten. She could not forget those rides, those cosey carriage lunches sent by his invalid mother. They must linger in her memory even though he should never come again.

At last rumors reached her that he was not doing well, had more than once gotten into disgrace with the faculty and been threatened with suspension. At the beginning of his second year these rumors assumed a definite form. One afternoon Mr. Hamlin asked her to remain a few minutes.

"I find, Miss Gray, that Jack is in trouble. His father is distressed and angry. Mrs. Ellis has sent you a note; here it is. She has faith in your influence over him. I think you may do him good now. You certainly brought to light happy traits that had lain dormant before. He 's getting off the track again; but I believe in the fellow, if you do n't give him up, Miss Gray."

She took the note, rewarding him for his faith in her young friend by one of those responsive smiles that lent to her quiet face a wonderful glow.

As she read the note a spasm of pain chased

the smile away, and glancing up, her dark eyes full of sadness, she said,

"If I write a line to Jack, how can he get it, Mr. Hamlin?"

"I will take it, if you like."

"Thank you; you are very kind to me."

The words were simple, the tone meaningless, but he was moved, despite his apparent indifference. As he waited for the note, he thought how gladly he would brighten all her life by kindness if he might. The temptation was strong to tell her so then and there. But no, he had read her character too well to risk so much. He should not gain her friendship by sudden impulse, and he might lose his teacher.

Saturday morning came—her day of freedom. The increased salary had allowed the luxury of another room—up under the roof, to be sure, but neatly furnished, and looking beyond the toiling, busy crowd below to distant hills and a fine expanse of western sky. This was her refuge, where her weary mind sought rest and her hopeless heart found all of peace she ever expected to have on earth.

As she sat there dreaming, steps came over the stairs and a rap at the door wakened her.

"Jack, you have not quite forgotten me, then?"

"Why, Miss Gray, I should have come long

ago, but thought you would n't care to see a wild boy."

She led him in, and sat near, winning him at once with that radiant smile that had rewarded him often before.

"I always care to see you, Jack. I have few friends, you know. Outside these poor rooms, you are the only one who keeps with me my secret."

"That 's so, Miss Gray. I wish I 'd not kept away so long."

"I wish so too, Jack; and now that you have come to see me, you will let me prove myself a friend and help you as I used to."

Jack wanted to stand well before her. He had hoped she was unaware of his fall from rectitude: and when in calm, tender tones she told him of the stories reaching her, and the pain it had given her, he was inclined to fall back upon his dignity and reserve. Flushing angrily, he asked,

"Is it friendly to believe all you hear of me, Miss Gray?"

"Do you doubt my friendship, Jack?"

"I thought one attribute was trust."

"A better attribute than blind trust, Jack, is faithfulness, and I can plainly see that you have not the innocence of the boy I first knew."

"I 'm older, Miss Gray; you 'll find little of

innocence after you are fairly launched into the world. I 'm no worse than ten thousand others."

"The world cannot take our treasures unless we give them, Jack. One may see the fire, not rush blindly into it. But I did n't ask you here to rebuke or censure or make you unhappy, but to tell you something. May I!"

"Yes, Miss Gray, I 'm resigned," he answered in a reckless, do n't-care tone, unlike his former happy way. "You 're just like mother."

"And you believe in the *mother-love*, even if you do doubt my friendship a little?"

"I believe in both, Miss Gray. I 'm ashamed of myself: but the truth is, I 'm in with a hard set of boys, and am not going right, that 's a fact. I might as well make a clean breast of it."

"Never mind confessions, Jack. Let me read you a page of my own life, one that I have not opened for many a long year, and never thought to again. But if it might help you to be firm as a rock to resist temptation, I shall not regret the bitterness of returning to it."

"Do n't, Miss Gray, do n't. I 'll do all you ask without; it 's too much for you to do this for me."

"No, if you were my young brother I should do it gladly. I will call you brother. How will that do, Jack?" giving him her hand.

He caught it fervently, saying,

"I 'm sure you are kind as any sister could be, but I never had one."

"Let me hasten and make the story short. After hearing it I believe you will grow strong to say 'no' to any companion. I was about as old as you were the first time I saw you when my first grief came to me; before that life had been a succession of gala days. My parents were wealthy, my home a paradise of comfort, refinement, and beauty. I was an only daughter, with one older brother, and he was the pride of our hearts; all the hopes of my parents centred in him. My mother and I cared for no pleasure we might not share with him, and his joys were magnified if we could partake of the same. Then came the first sorrow. Our father died—a noble man, kind, indulgent, tender. My mother was broken-hearted. In her helplessness and grief she turned to my brother, intrusting all her interest to him. We had not a thought that he could fail us. He was in college then, a tall, handsome, manly fellow, with a host of gay friends that followed him everywhere. But he loved us best; he gave us all his leisure time for months, until we had become accustomed to our sorrow. He was gentle, thoughtful, and considerate, and we loved and trusted him, oh how entirely.

"But the cloud still hung over us. My mo-

ther could not rally from the first blow, her health was shattered; and when her only son, beloved and trusted, was tempted, yielded, and fell, she could only fold her hands and with tearful entreaties try to win him back to us. Many times false friends allured him from us, helping him to fall lower and lower each time, until prayers by day and tears by night were the portion of this best of mothers, but all of no avail. Gradually our large property dwindled away, and one day, with the suddenness of a hurricane, we realized that our home was lost to us. We were penniless, friendless, homeless; and he who had promised my father on his bed of death to care for us as tenderly as human love could was wrecked with all the rest. It killed my mother, Jack; her heart was broken, and in mercy God took her home.

"One faithful creature clung to us through it all, my good nurse. You have seen her. I need not tell you of the misery since, the utter hopelessness, the depths of degradation and sin. I *cannot* tell you of my brother's life, his vile companions, my days of torture and my nights of terror, until the wrath of the Lord struck him down a helpless imbecile, and I in my despair found that in His wrath He still remembered mercy, for my brother did not die. The rest you know. I found my present position as

teacher, glad to earn my daily bread. My mission now is to care for one who, if he could have been strong to resist temptation, would have died to save me one hour's pain."

The retrospection had been too much for her. Her lips quivered, her voice trembled, and with the last words her head sank upon the white, slender hand and sobs shook her whole frame.

Jack was silent; his lips worked convulsively; but her grief was too violent for words of his to quell. It died away at last, and looking into his sympathetic face she said,

"Your mother loves you, Jack. You are all she has. Will you fail her? Will you yield to selfish gratification and rob her of a son? She is not strong. You may not have her long, Jack."

He rose and took both of her hands, saying,

"Miss Gray, I'm glad I know this. God bless you for telling me! Before Him and with His help I promise to stand upright in the future and firmly turn from every weakness. I will not fail her; I will not fail you, my sister. Do you trust me?"

"As never before, Jack;" and the smile that won him first beamed on him now through her tears with all its illuminating light.

He went from Miss Gray to his mother's room. No woman's step could be lighter, no

touch more tender or voice more gentle, than his as he dropped before the lounge, drawn near a light wood blaze on the hearth, and kissed the delicate face turned inquiringly towards him.

"I 've come to confess, mother dearest."

"No, no, my darling boy. Let there be no need of that between us. Surely we can trust each other."

"Do n't stoop to my level, mother."

"Is it so? Then, dear boy, reach even to a higher than mine."

He kissed the hand reached out to him and dropped his head upon the cushion beside her, saying, "Trust me still, if you can. With Christ's help I will not fail you again, mother. I will be true from now."

"I 'm sure of it, dear boy. I can put all my fear away. We will be all we can to each other now, Jack." Then rousing herself to more cheer she asked if he had seen Clare.

"No, not yet. I called on Miss Gray."

"Ah I am glad. Some time I hope she will come here; but she is so taxed it would be wrong to ask it now. The girls come often. I 'm very fond of Clare's little friend."

"Barby, as Hal calls her? Yes, she 's a gem, mother. They tell me she paints well already. I must call and see what she does in that line. I wonder if she makes it profitable. I suppose

they need to badly enough. Clare would know. I wish we might get up some more rides on the bicycle. How Dot did enjoy them! I suppose Nellie keeps on the same ambitious course. Do you see her often?"

"An occasional call—when she has a new costume to exhibit, and sometimes to bring me a bunch of roses. They are all thoughtful."

"Yes, Nellie gets herself up in rare style; but that satisfies her soul—evidently the end of her ambition."

"One can hardly blame *her*."

"Poor Nell! If only her mother had been like you! But if you do n't need me I 'll ask her to ride, little mother." The tone brought a glow into the sweet pale face.

"Go, dear; Nellie is fond of riding. I shall be glad to see you back; do n't hasten, though."

Jack was not indolent, but not quite ready to buckle down to hard work. He wanted a few more years of pleasure, more freedom from restraint, more time to bask in the sunshine and indulge in manly sports. He had been denied nothing that could add to his enjoyment. Now his father expected him to apply himself to his work during its legitimate hours. He was ambitious to have this only son a success in whatever vocation he should select for his life-work.

Thus far his wishes, barely hinted at, had

availed nothing. The boy laughed, frolicked, and frittered away much time that should have been given to more serious pursuits. Still the father waited silently and hopefully. This suspension had caused him deep mortification, and for once his patience was nearly exhausted.

The mother, as we have seen, idolized him. She discovered her own glad spirit reflected in his buoyant nature and rejoiced in his happiness, sure that as time passed he would grow strong and manly.

"Now," she said, "is his time for merry-making; the days are longer, the sun brighter, the flowers have richer fragrance and more brilliant bloom. Let him be happy while he can; by-and-by he will toil the harder to repay you for the waiting. Be patient with him, dear."

The husband smiled with scant approval, patted her shoulder, and turned away.

Thus Jack's enforced vacation meant a few hours of study under a private tutor and many more of gayety. His pony was his chief enjoyment, with Jip ever at his heels. Sometimes he hunted, or called it hunting, seldom bringing back game. Again, with rod in hand, he pretended to fish; but his dash and noise, his whistling or singing, warned the shy dwellers of the brook, and after swinging his fly a while that pleasure palled, and with never-failing hilarity

he turned to another; not unlike the brook, swiftly flowing on with sparkle and babble, doing little good, perhaps no harm for the present, though liable to become a torrent, bearing in its mad flow everything that would obstruct its course. So habits formed in youth and recklessly indulged master the will and destroy the man.

His affection for his mother, fervent and unvarying, was his anchor. It kept him sound at heart and pure in life amid temptations of which she, shielded as she was, could have no knowledge. There was a spice of chivalry in the boy's nature that incited him to a tender thought for her weakness, that made him gentle in her presence and attentive to her needs. He never wearied of being to her the sunshine of her sick-room or ministering to her in any way. Though he often rebelled at the tasks of class-work, he could read to her by the hour or sing his college songs as brightly and gayly to drive away her pains as he would among his comrades. He was the pride of her heart and the glory of her days. How she gazed on his handsome face and listened for his coming step! How the sound of his voice lingered in her ears long after he had left her side! She knew she could be with him but little longer, and prayer for God's grace to keep her boy and shield him was in her heart

always, and on her lips in his absence. He never saw her tears. The sick-room must always be the brightest spot in the house for him and the father. Thus they were blinded to the fact that her weakness increased, that the slight form grew each day more fragile, that the flush in her cheek, so lovely to them, was but a signal of the approach of one whom they feared to harbor even in thought.

The nurse wondered at their blindness and almost rebelled when evening after evening she heard the lively chat of father and son, the merry jest and the low carol of the boy, who had instinctively learned to modulate his tones to his mother's pleasure and apparent need.

If in her anxiety for her patient she made a sign of disapproval, the mother hushed her.

"Don't trouble them, I beg. We are so happy, and they will have it to remember by-and-by."

Thus the weeks of Jack's suspension from college proved his salvation. He never forgot that loving presence, that yearning look that appealed to all that was noble in him, the influence of those ever-to-be-remembered evenings when he had so easily and gladly thrown off the tempter's yoke and buckled on, if not at once the whole armor of God, at least a shield of faith, with a strong determination to walk wor-

thily of that pure spirit—a shield that would help him to fight against the weakness of his will and triumph in the end.

He was not sure how much his mother knew of his disregard of college laws and the unhappy result, for she had never expressed a doubt of him in word or look. It was that far-seeing faith, that holy mother-love, that saved him from himself.

He had failed to meet his father's requirements, had disregarded his wishes again and again. It had not been low desires or base pursuits that first enticed him. His free, generous nature demanded companionship, his jovial tastes clamored to be met, and in yielding he had overstepped the mark and been reckless of reproof.

At his first meeting with his father he had said, "I know you're disgusted with me. I s'pose I could keep in the tracks if I liked it better; but I do hate to grind, that's a fact."

"And you have two years after this," frowning sternly.

"I wish they were over and I out of it."

"You'd be a poor stick if they were. It sounds harsh, Jack, but you stand in desperate need of just the drill you'll get by holding bravely to your tasks for the next two years. If you can't muster manliness enough to conquer

your indolence I shall be ashamed of you. I hope it's nothing worse, Jack."

"I will, father. Try me once more. I don't believe I 'm lazy, father."

"Not exactly. You 're as full of motion as a wild colt. But life is not to be danced away. You 've had your play; now solid work must come in."

"I can be active enough; this buckling down to the drudgery of it is what I hate. I could stand a reasonable amount of work, but for a steady diet, father, it 's too much. But I 'll do it or die. I would n't like to wager any remarkable success, but I wont disgrace you, father."

"I hope you wont, my boy. If you had as many brothers as your friend Burr we might not ask so much of you." He shook his head and turned away, sensibly moved.

"Trust me once more, father."

"I will, Jack. The years are before you; it 's not too late. You know your duty and where to find help if you ask. A stern Christian principle is your only safeguard."

"I 'm as ignorant as a fool of the first principles. I wish I was more like my mother."

"You are like her as she was twenty-five years ago. I should be sorry for you to lose the keen delight you have in living. Put the same spirit into your work, make your standard high,

and keep yourself up to it, then we shall not fear for you."

They separated. Jack went to his mother for a good-by word before calling on the young friends who were to be pressed into the service of making his banishment endurable.

Nellie looked her freshest, eyes sparkling and voice eager; had just come in from the street, flung off her carriage wrap, and was lounging away the hours in solitude. She met him with genuine pleasure, greeted him cordially, and begged him to remain to lunch with them.

"Is Jetty out there, Jack?"

"Yes. Will you ride?"

"Indeed I will; just the day for it. We will lunch in ten minutes. Where shall we go?"

"Anywhere, over the hills or down the river road."

"The river road, that 's the best; everybody drives there."

Mrs. Miller met him graciously at lunch, evidently quite satisfied to find Nellie taken off her hands for the day.

A half-hour of lively conversation over the table and Nellie prepared herself, appearing, as Jack pictured her to his mother, "rigged out in a stunning dark blue stuff, with a blue and white striped skirt, a kind of white vest and cuffs, and a jolly little blue sailor-hat trimmed with blue

velvet and white. She looked gay, and the best of it was, little mother, she knew it. There 's Barbara would look just as lovely and not have an inkling of it. But we took the river road, and Miss Nellie was quite attractive, I assure you."

"I can well believe it."

"All she needs, mother, is soul."

"It is there. It only wants a higher impulse —to hear the call of God."

The ride was exhilarating. The early summer was passing. Fields were filled with the cut hay and the air with its fragrance. The foliage moved with the slight breeze and was vocal with the carol of birds. Beyond the city, in the broad pastures and on the more distant highland, beautiful dun cattle cropped the verdure, raising calm, contented eyes as the happy pair swept by. The river, on the other side, moved quickly and steadily on. The setting sun neared the horizon as they entered the city and drew towards home.

CHAPTER XIII.

MISSION OF THE WILD FLOWERS.

BARBARA sat in her tiny work-room early in the day, looking through the miniature window-panes, relics of the pristine glory of the old house, attracted by a mass of color across the way. The city had been steadily growing nearer, yet there were spaces in which the sweet, wild things she loved could flourish. It was a signal not to be disregarded. Taking her hat she ran over to see what had blossomed so lately. They were a clump of asters, deeper and richer in color than she had found before. A glow of delight spread over her face. She picked every one. They almost spoke to her, as friends do. They recalled the delicate face of the mother she still missed and the summer days of long ago.

With full hands she turned back. A great lumbering cart, drawn by two powerful horses, was passing. Between the animals an ugly-looking dog trotted. The man, way up in front, looked down upon her, his hard face relaxing at the sight, even as a dreary scene takes on the glow of foreign light.

She looked up as he passed, clasping still her

flowers. A hansom approached from the opposite direction, and in the middle of the road, between the two teams, the old ragpicker plodded along towards her. As the wagon came abreast the woman, the dog, by some instinct peculiar to himself, or the result of his master's training, with a growl and bark dashed from between the horses and sprang towards the woman. She gave a frightened cry and fell back a pace, directly in front of the hansom and under the feet of the horse.

The driver held back, but he was not quick enough; the woman lay prone before him. The drayman called angrily to his dog, sprang to the ground, and gave him a vicious kick that sent him howling between the wheels.

The two men were trying to raise her as Barbara reached them. Soon her asters were on the ground and she on her knees in the dust, trying with her white apron to stanch the flow from an ugly wound in the woman's head. She was unconscious; and as they raised her slightly her arm hung limp from the shoulder.

"Be careful! oh be careful! Let me help. Bring her to my home; I will care for her. Will she die?"

"Better lug her right to the hospital," said the rough drayman. "She may die; it's bad enough. *You* can't do anything," looking with

a show of scorn upon the trim little figure kneeling at his feet.

"What *can* be done?"

"Put her in your carriage and get her there quick," he said to the driver of the hansom.

"No indeed, man; she'll die before I get her there. Take her yourself; 't was your brute of a dog did it."

"I tell you your brute of a horse stepped on her. If you don't get her there quicker 'n lightning, I'll have the law on you."

"Do, do take her quickly. I'll go and help you. Get her in quickly; it is not far. Do it, I say."

"You'll go along, miss, and explain?"

"Yes, yes; I told you so. Be gentle."

They were as careful as they knew how to be. Barbara got into the carriage just as she was, the stained apron bound about the woman's head, which she held in her lap as tenderly as she would had it been that of the daintiest lady in the city.

"Go quickly; don't jar," as he shut the door upon the two, saying to the other man,

"They can't say I killed her."

"No fear, man; get along as quick as you can, and stop your blarney; she might be dead now by the looks of her."

There was no delay; they went rapidly. The

motion seemed to rouse her at last. She sighed and groaned as they turned into the driveway and stopped before the entrance of the great stone building. Attendants immediately appeared and took her in out of sight.

"Speak fair for me, miss. I 'll take you safe home." He was uneasy.

"You were not to blame; it was the dog," she answered. "Yes, I will go back with you in a moment."

"Take your time, miss; I 'd wait the day long for you. Just let them understand it was entirely an accident."

She went in, meaning to see Maggie. Through the hall and over the stairs to the children's ward she went with swift feet. The nurses knew her, for she was a frequent visitor. She met Maggie at the door, tray in hand, for some late sleeper. A quick greeting, and,

"Come with me, Bab; I 've a dear little fellow up here. He has slept till now. I 'm giving him a late breakfast. But what started you so early?"

Barbara told her of the accident, adding,

"I wish you 'd let me know, Maggie, how she gets on; I 'm interested in her. It 's an old rag-gatherer, the one who found Hale and little May that night. Do you remember?"

"Yes; strange you should run across her again. I 'll follow her up and let you know.

But look here, what do you think of those eyes?" pointing to a child whose waxen face was lighted by eyes so black and large they almost blazed.

"Gazing into futurity! Wonderful!"

"Not a bit, only hungry. Wants his breakfast, bless him!"

Deftly arranging a napkin and sitting by his side, she fed him. His silent lips were pressed with desire, his whole face eloquent with unspoken longing.

"Poor famished little fellow, let him have all he wants! Let him drink it, Maggie."

Maggie smiled.

"Not yet, Bab; we must be careful for a little."

"He has been *very* ill?"

"Hardly saved him. He 's coming back slowly; he will live, the pretty boy," she sighed.

"You are tired, Maggie."

"A little. This has been a pull. I would n't leave him; but the worry 's over. He 's so wakeful. I wish you 'd brought a flower or something."

"I will, this very afternoon. I should so like to help. Wild flowers?"

"Any little thing to take his thoughts. A bunch of grass amuses them for hours."

"I 'll remember. Now I must go; the man 's waiting."

He would have waited all day for the ener-

getic maid in the quiet gingham frock and straw hat who had helped him out of what he considered a desperate scrape.

Maggie's fitness for the work she had chosen showed itself in every department to which she was called, eminently in her labor among the children. She loved them. She felt equal to the task of ministering to their minds, of understanding their characteristics, of coming down to their level, making herself a child with them and delighting herself in their responsive love. She felt that God had chosen her work for her, and she tried to do it faithfully, hoping only for his approval. There was no time that day for Barbara's painting. The bunch of asters was forgotten as she hastened the noon duties preparatory to her afternoon expedition in search of flowers for Maggie's little patients. The dinner hour passed with the recital of the morning adventure to her father, and basket in hand she turned from the door just as Jack drove up followed by Jip.

"Where are you bound, Barbara?"

"After wild flowers," turning a bright face towards him.

"I 'm just in time to help; will you ride?"

"That will be delightful, thank you. Then you can go with me to the hospital and help trim Maggie's ward."

"That 's the game, is it? Just what I like. How does she get on with the little shavers?"

"She delights in it, and they worship her. It 's a beautiful work, and Maggie is full of enthusiasm. She is ready to give her life to it. She has found her vocation without a doubt."

"And you?"

"Mine came long ago. It 's father, you know."

"I hear you are painting. I 'd like to see your work."

"Not much to show, Jack. I love to mix it with my other work; father likes it too. He often brings me a flower or an odd spray of leaves; one day an empty nest fastened to a twig. I made a little sketch of it, and he has framed it for himself, he says. To-day I must get all the bright things I can; the children have so little to help them forget their pain."

"You are a kind of ministering spirit, Barbara, do you know?"

"Only to father. I don't know what we should do without each other."

"I 'd like to find duty as fascinating; but it 's a detestable word sometimes to me."

"Oh no, Jack; that 's not your trouble."

"Explain, if you can. I 'd tackle the enemy and throttle him if I knew where to find him."

"I think the difference lies here, my duties are agreeable; I love them and they come easy,

while yours are difficult, and require a strong will and determination to master—just the qualities you need to have, Jack. After you conquer yourself there 'll be no trouble; and duty will have a pleasant sound, because it helps to make the very best of our lives."

"I suppose so; but all the same I hate the confounded work that 's cut out for me."

"The more hateful it is the more force you exercise to accomplish the result, do n't you see? and you grow strong in the battle, as men should. If everything was pleasant and easy where would be the discipline that builds up a vigorous, noble manhood? I 'm glad you must work harder than you like, Jack, for you need it more than some."

"Thanks; your frankness is refreshing. What a little preacher you are."

"I often think of these things, Jack, when I am alone, waiting for father. I think of him. Men must work and battle for right all their days. The world would be beautiful if all men did so." Her eyes looked far off and dreamy.

"And you girls, have you no part in the strife?"

"Ah yes; women must be patient; mother was, and so willing to bear everything. We must be brave and happy for those we love. Your mother is so?"

"None more so. Little mother! I suppose

she bears more than she reveals. Yes, you are patient too; more than I could be. Do you ever see Nellie?"

She understood the connection, but made no sign.

"Not often since we left school." She told him of the morning's accident, and as they drove round the mountain road pointed out to him the straggling, winding path among the bushes that she had followed.

They soon found places where golden-rod and asters grew in rank luxuriance, and farther along, climbing on fence rail and stone wall, graceful sprays of white clematis, still in flower. They filled the basket and piled the carriage full—enough for more than one ward, Barbara said, glowing with satisfaction.

"If we go round the mountain and home the other way, there are crowds of sweet-scented clover on that road."

"Oh we will. I do want some to paint. How kind to think of it. Let us hurry."

They drove rapidly. Jack was quiet. Barbara's honest words had more weight with him than he would acknowledge to himself.

"You are going back to college, Jack?"

"Yes, when term begins."

"I 'm glad of that." It was neither the words nor tone that nettled him. He hardly knew just

what it implied. Did she think he had been expelled or that he was more unworthy than he felt himself to be? He wanted to stand well with her. He didn't know why. She had no influence in the circle in which he moved. She was nothing to him; Nellie still sneered disagreeably when she was mentioned. But there was an undefined charm about her; in what it consisted he could not tell. Was it her face? It was beautiful; but it was not in the face alone. Her manner of speech or words? She was happy in conversation, quick and bright, nothing more. He mused long. "She is good and true," he said at last, and there is a charm in pure goodness that wealth may not purchase or learning simulate. He thought he had solved the mystery. There lay the secret charm.

"Did you think I was out of college for good?" he asked abruptly.

"I shouldn't like to think it *not* for good," laughing.

"I haven't perpetrated any crime, Barbara. I didn't keep up to the requirements. I wanted a good time—and—"

"You had it?" she asked quietly.

"Well, I don't enjoy this part of it. And I'm going in for hard work next year."

"I'm so glad," with a happy ring to her voice.

"Glad! You're a queer friend. Glad I'm going away; glad I've got to work day and night. That's comforting to a fellow, to say the least."

"I only mean—you don't understand me. I wont be disagreeable, Jack, but it's better to buckle right down, as you say, and come out with honor. You don't want to be like that stray leaf, blown anywhere, perhaps down hill before you know it. It will be grand for you to do right and overcome. I suppose it is hard, and it ought to be; knowledge is not like a fortune, that can come as a gift. You must work for it. And it's so much better than money. If you wait for the crowd to knock you into shape, you might as well be a lump of putty, nothing more."

"You're right, but every one is grinding it into me. I suppose I need it."

Again her merry laugh rang out. It was contagious, and Jack's ill-humor vanished.

They reached the hospital. Jack fastened his pony, told Jip to watch the carriage, took the basket and followed Barbara.

"Where do you go? Shall I be intruding?"

"Perhaps I'd better ask the matron; I don't know about gentlemen visitors. Wait a little in here," showing him into a small reception-room, where he drummed softly on the piano and pon-

dered the not very complimentary words of his friend.

"After all," he said to himself, "mother's faith in me is worth more than the opinions of all the rest. I don't care what they think; I 'll live for mother."

When a boy makes that promise, with an honest purpose, it is a long step towards living for God.

Maggie broke in upon his revery.

"Come up; my children are ready to receive. I 'm glad to see you, Jack; and the flowers, oh they are too lovely! Barbara has gone right to work banking them all over the mantel. It was so nice in her to think of it. It will be a real festival for my little people. Come right in, Jack. Oh no, it wont trouble them. They 're used to callers. We have some every day. This is the convalescent ward. One little fellow, that one, is picking up fast."

"What eyes! The biggest part of his face."

"Yes, wonderful, a dear little fellow. Give him a flower, Jack, and see him look at it."

"Startling, upon my word. Don't you get nervous and think they 'll die?"

"Oh no, they 're a happy little people, only when they suffer, poor things."

"I promised to help Barbara." He turned towards her. The whole fireplace was trans-

formed: a bank of spruce boughs filled the space, with clusters of golden-rod interspersed; and in front asters gleamed from the dark background like stars in an evening sky. On the mantel above fell long festoons of clematis from a mass of sweet clover.

"Barby, no one in the world could do that but you. How perfectly lovely!"

"Think so, Maggie? Jack, just throw this over that picture-frame, please."

Little cries of delighted appreciation from the children filled the room.

"Now every little one must have a bunch of clover, then I must go."

As they finished and were turning away from the happy children, a lady entered, of fine appearance, elegantly dressed.

"I have brought some fruit for you, nurse," she said, addressing Maggie. "I left it in the ante-room. How beautifully the flowers are arranged. What exquisite taste! Who did it? Ah, Mr. Ellis, this is your work. I 'm glad you are so benevolently inclined."

Jack bowed with deference, disclaiming any part in the adornment.

"It 's the work of my friend, Miss Allen, Mrs. St. John."

"You have made an ideal picture for the little ones, Miss Allen; it 's a charming success."

"Thank you. I love to do it."

"One would know that."

Barbara threw kisses to the children as she left, which they gleefully returned.

Turning to Maggie, Mrs. St. John asked,

"Who is she? She is beautiful."

"Yes, she is indeed. She 's a natural artist; her tastes all tend that way. She is an old schoolmate of Mr. Ellis'."

"Allen! Strange I have never met her."

"Not at all, Mrs. St. John; they live beyond the city a little and are in quite humble circumstances."

"A farmer, then."

"No, her father is a carpenter, quite poor. She has no mother. She paints a little and keeps house for her father. We all love her."

"Only a carpenter. She looked like an embodied poem. I must know her."

"Ah, Mrs. St. John, Barbara is more than that. She 's a royal daughter of the King."

"You are a stanch friend. Does she sell her sketches?"

"She has n't yet, but she would, I know, be glad to; I wish she could find a way. She makes the most exquisite little studies for decorating everything, and they ought to be a help to her."

"I see. Some of my young friends might like them for their china. I will call on her, if you can give me her address."

"Gladly. I do hope you will. Oh, Mrs. St. John, you have been so kind to me and my babies, I wish you could help Barbara on a little. We do want her to do great things. She 's had so little help."

"If her friends are all as devoted as you are, she will not fail. I will certainly call."

The lady took the address, and a few mornings after, Barbara was surprised to see a carriage draw up to the door, and the same lady she met at the hospital alight. The knocker sounded, and Barbara invited her guest to enter with the shy grace so natural to her.

"Miss Allen, would you show me some of your studies, and let me talk with you a little of the things we both love?"

"I should be so happy," flushing with pleased wonder.

They went to the tiny room; Barbara drew her father's large rocker before the window.

"Why, child, this is charming!"

The walls were covered with little sketches of wood and field and swamp: rocks with vines trailing over them, banks of moss with ferns springing about them, a touch of sunset glory, little gems of rural beauty in monochrome, with

rich, delicious summer coloring or with faint spring tints—all showing the true appreciation of beauty, the real loving hand. Each panel of the old door was covered with a picture from the very heart of nature, and all so original and purely artistic. She looked searchingly at everything, then turning to the gratified girl, who had spread a portfolio of studies upon the stand and stood beside them inquiringly, she said,

"My dear, I have come to ask a favor. I need your help."

Barbara's pretty head nodded slightly and she bent towards her assentingly. Nothing could make her happier than to be of use. The very words appealed to her: she was needed.

"I am to have a few friends next week, Wednesday evening, and I want my rooms trimmed with flowers. The children's ward showed me who could do it. Is it asking too much? You shall have all the help you need, and I will leave it entirely to your own exquisite taste. Will you do it for me?"

"Oh, yes; I should delight to do it."

"Thank you. That is very nice." How graciously some natures can confer benefits.

"Now will you let me purchase a few of your studies for a friend who is fond of china painting? and I must say she does good work for an amateur."

She selected twelve, asking what she should pay for them.

"Oh I don't know; I have never sold any. They are not worth much."

"Yes they are; worth more than the pretty prints we find at the art stores. And you must put a fair price on your work, my dear. Let me give you for these a dollar apiece; they are worth it, and if you like I can find purchasers for you."

"It is too much!" gasped Barbara.

"Not at all; I am not sure it is enough. Now will you come with me and look at the rooms and make your plans? I'd like each room different, and everything right from the heart of nature."

Barbara was soon ready and driving with this new friend towards the city.

The elegant home was not so bewildering to her as Clare's had been two years before. She went from room to room, studied the possibilities of each, questioned and suggested, and at last promised to do the best she could.

"And that," said Mrs. St. John, "will be perfection. What can I do to forward it and help?"

"I must have four large baskets, and come here Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons, with a man to help me; that is all."

"You dear child, what a help you are to me. It will be beautiful, I am sure. And after this

affair is off our hands I shall buy more of your little water-colors. The cardinal flower, as you arranged it among the swamp grasses, is charming, and the gentian; then the one you made of lichens, partridge-berry, and mosses. I shall want more as soon as my friends see these."

They parted, Barbara to dream of spacious rooms adorned with all the treasure of the wild-woods, and Mrs. St. John planning to encourage and support the young artist in her work. She was entirely won by the purity and charm of Barbara's unaffected manner, her enthusiastic love of the beautiful, her spontaneous, almost childlike delight in her own efforts.

Mr. Allen coming home at night was struck by Barbara's air of suppressed excitement, her quick, nervous manner of preparing supper and of finishing up the evening work. There was something to be told, he was sure of it; and something pleasant too. He knew well the look of satisfaction in her face that could not be concealed, the air of half pride that told of success, the note of triumph in her voice that it was not in human nature to hide.

So perfect was the sympathy between them, so closely were their lives linked together, so much was the character of each in harmony with that of the other, that when all was done, the last dish was put away and the last step taken,

he drew her little chair beside his own, and holding out his hand, said,

"Tell me now, Bab, what good thing has come to-day."

"I was never so happy in my life, father."

"I knew it. What has happened?"

Then she beamed upon him, eager to have him know and understand her exquisite happiness—the wonderfully kind new friend, the great house with its grand rooms given over to her own simple powers and weak hands to decorate; and only with her own wild flowers. Ah, but she felt the possibility within. She knew just how she would have it look, from the very entrance through each beautiful space. Her dainty pets should tell their sweet story to those who scarcely knew them. She would find new treasures every day. She must have all her time for gathering and studying and copying. "I can't give you any more time for a week than when I went to school all day. We 'll have to go back to the baker's bread and simple diet for a while, and I shall take up my trade as well as you, *mon père*."

He laughed and told her he was proud of her success and rejoiced in her happiness, would be willing to live on pea-soup, rice, and onions for a month that she might make a fair start in the new work.

"No, papa, we'll not go back to those days."

"There'll be no competition, Bab; you'll have the field to yourself. We'll soon be able to buy a strip of land outside somewhere and put up a bit of a house, at this rate, my little woman."

"We will, father. And I'll have a studio on the lower floor, with water brought in and basins set for my wild flowers, and places all lined with zinc for my ferns. Oh delicious!"

"She paid you generously for the trifles, child."

"Ah, but she did n't call them trifles, though it was too much, I 'm sure."

"What then?"

"Works of art! Think of it, twelve whole dollars! The first I ever earned. I must have a bank book. I'll save every penny for the little studio, and wont we be happy! But—oh, father—" The beaming face was overcast, the brown eyes swimming; her head fell on his arm. He held her close a moment.

"I hope she knows it, Bab. Sometimes I imagine her very near."

"And I, papa. I was thinking that she taught it all to me. I never should have loved the sweet things but for her, you know. They make the world so beautiful and my heart so happy."

"Get the Book, child. We 'll read a bit, and to bed."

Barbara lighted a small lamp and placed it beside the old, much-worn Bible upon a stand near, the mother's stand. The book always rested there. "Why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field. They toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith!"

CHAPTER XIV.

NATURE AND ART.

WHEN Maggie found time to make inquiries she learned that the rag-picker's arm had been fractured between the elbow and shoulder. She was still unconscious from the blow on the head from the forefoot of the horse that threw her down. There was little to build on. She might come out of it and recover, or sink away without regaining consciousness. Maggie could do nothing. She had the best of care, and absorbed in her own more interesting charge the case almost passed from her mind. The boy who had given her so much anxiety was convalescing rapidly, and a night or two of entire rest had made her brisk and vigorous as ever. She was a great favorite with all connected with the institution, especially her sister nurses. She had such a fund of good nature and common sense, was so quick of hand and foot when needed, so strong of nerve when cases came up that the boldest sometimes shrank from; she never faltered, but met them with courage and endurance. Her nerves seemed steel-clad and every muscle obedient to an unflinching will. The surgeons with

whom she sometimes worked hardly believed she was the same bright spirit whom they had met in the pleasant grounds and on the lawn, frolicking with her fragile little sufferers and tenderly devoting herself to their pleasure; none more gentle and yielding than the noble-hearted girl, none with more firmness when to yield would have been cruelty in its consequences.

The woman lingered from day to day, at moments partially roused and muttering fragments of sentences connected with her past life, they thought.

There came a time when the night nurse needed help, and Maggie was called upon. Always ready to fill an empty space, she responded heartily. There was in her make-up a reserve force for any emergency, and on this night she took her place among the more serious cases where vigilant care was imperatively demanded. Her duties were plain. There were but few patients, the old woman demanding the most attention.

In the dim light of the long ward and the impressive stillness of the night as it wore on Maggie, sitting by her side, felt a strange sense of companionship that she knew must be purely imaginary. Her little patients never affected her so. She smoothed the straggling gray locks from the pinched face and moistened the dry

lips. She wished she would open her eyes, if only for a moment. The attentions, small as they were, seemed grateful to the woman; she moved a hand slightly and muttered. Was she waking? Would she ever wake again? Did she know anything of the infinite Love that was holding her there between life and death? Had she any friends? Oh how many questions Maggie asked herself as her gaze rested on the drawn, livid face. Suddenly the eyes opened, great wild eyes, and she startled her nurse with the words,

"Don't, Sal. What use to kill the brat, Sal, you fool!"

Maggie started like one shot. In an instant she was back to her childhood, to her early tormentor, to the creature who must have known her origin and concealed it from her. And this woman knew the story, knew the terrible drunken creature who had made her childish years a torture, who had blotted from her memory by years of abuse all knowledge of her history, of the mother she might have lovingly remembered. Would she die? God forbid!

A few drops of a stimulant were given, the pillows carefully rearranged, the restless hands quieted, and Maggie prayed that she might live.

She inquired later if the nurse had ever heard her speak in this manner before.

"Yes, she often speaks of Sal, calls her a drunken brute, and threatens her. There seems to be a child too she 's interested in. But that 's not unusual; such cases are often delirious."

"Do all you can to save her. I 'll help you when I 'm off duty, if you need."

"Thanks. Poor old thing, I doubt if she pulls through."

"She must. Watch her. Let me help. I 'll watch any night. I 'm strong and my little fellows are doing splendidly."

"Every one does that has anything to do with you. You must impart your own superfluous life to help out theirs."

"I wonder if there 's anything in it. I 'd give months of my life to save hers."

"Why? You are a queer child."

An hour of sleep, a refreshing bath, and a good breakfast fitted Maggie for her day's work.

That day Aunt Clarissa came into the city. At such times she never failed to spend an hour at the hospital and take Maggie back with her to Mrs. Hamlin's to dinner. For a few hours she must have an entire change of scene.

"I want you to come into the surgical ward with me, auntie, before we go. Let me get permission."

"No, child; I like these jolly little convalescents better. I never could abide cutting."

"There 's nothing of that sort there now. I want to tell you something and show you an old woman there."

"Well, have your own way. How much do you want? I 'll trust you."

"This is n't a case for money. She does n't need anything now; but I watched her last night. She interested me."

Then she told the story, from which she recalled the vague impressions and dreams that still came sometimes when sleep was coy or light.

"Why have you never told me before?"

"You might have thought me silly; perhaps I am."

"Not a bit of it. But I want you to get permission to come home for a day as soon as you can. I 've something to show you."

"Connected with this? Oh, auntie!"

"There, be quiet, child. If this woman lives we may learn something. No matter whether we do or not, be sure, my child, there is nothing for you to know that will bring a throb of anything but content; I 'm sure of that."

"I 'll try and go back with you, auntie, for the night."

She made arrangements. There were others to take her place, and few but were glad to accommodate her.

After showing the sick woman to her aunt they went together to Mr. Hamlin's.

In the afternoon the three girls called on Barbara. She had spent the whole morning in the woods. Great masses of ferns were packed in damp places, beautiful mosses placed in shady spots and sprinkled; pans of delicate wild things, roots and all, were waiting for her pleasure. The girls were delighted when they heard of her good fortune.

"Now, Bab, you precious little enthusiast, I can return your kindness. I'm going home with auntie. Don't you want me to get you some of that climbing fern that runs all over the tiny birch saplings in the woods, and the pitcher-plant from the swamp?"

"Will you, Maggie? What a happy thought! I'll meet you at the train and help bring them home."

"Better still," said Clare; "I'll come after you in the carriage, Bab, and help bring them. Mamma would think that best, I know."

"Yes, that will be best. I shall come on the six o'clock train. I'll bring every nice thing I can find. Barbara, you will be famous!"

They were all drawn to the little maiden, so busy among her ferns, the lovely face all aglow with health and radiant with happiness. They could not stay long; they could be of no help to

her now, and Maggie must be on hand for the train.

She was glad to be at home again, glad to see Becky, and, more than all, that Aunt Clarissa was to show her something that would bring to her a little of the long ago. What would it reveal, what conceal? She could hardly wait for the train. Steam itself was not rapid enough for her now.

Miss Brainard did not keep her waiting. After a word of greeting to Becky they went up to the little old trunk in the garret, and under many a forgotten relic a package was revealed and placed in Maggie's hands as she sat on the floor near by.

"Is this it? Auntie, have you seen it?"

"Yes, just saw that it was clothing too small for you. Nothing more was found that could have belonged to you. I never unfolded the garments; the initials told the story. You were called Maggie; but of course there was no clew to the lost name, D. If this woman lives I have a feeling that she will know something, though there may be countless creatures by the name of 'Sal.'"

Maggie had held the package reverently. She could not open it; her hands trembled nervously. Where was her courage?

"Shall I open it for you, child?"

Maggie held it towards her; her voice trembled.

"You have loved me in spite of the friendless, forlorn wretchedness of what I was. You had no fears. You have given me everything. I ought to be satisfied. Do you blame me for wanting to know more?"

"Never! Blame you, indeed! Nothing I 'd like to know more myself than whose loving fingers placed those dainty stitches. See!"

She held a little garment up. Maggie took it. She could see nothing; her eyes were dim with tears.

Aunt Clarissa lifted other delicately made garments. They would fit a child of about three years; and as she unfolded the last one an old-fashioned card photograph fell from its folds into her lap. Maggie caught and devoured the face with eyes still moist.

"Auntie, it *must* be my mother's face!"

It was a bright, flashing face, with eyes black as a coal and hair like Maggie's, dark and abundant. On its back was written in a youthful hand, "Margaret Doane," and it was dated more than twenty years before.

"Yes, you look enough like it to be the child. It 's the face of a lady."

"To know *this* and nothing more; how can I bear it?"

"My child, God's ways are not as ours. You may learn more; but if not, you must be satisfied that his way is best. After all, patience and trust are good lessons. We must go to supper now. Becky will be impatient. Take the picture with you. If the woman recovers show it to her. It is not a face to be forgotten."

They went below, Maggie strongly moved. The next day Miss Brainard borrowed a neighbor's quiet old horse, for they were a primitive folk, ready to exchange courtesies, and took Maggie through a winding lane off from the main road back among the woods, where years before, as a girl, she had gone for blueberries and checkerberries in their different seasons, and helped her gather the lygodium, its long slender stalks with their many-lobed frondlets twining upon every support that offered itself, so beautiful for trimming; then beyond to the lower ground, where Jack-in-the-pulpit and a variety of the pitcher-plant grew in abundance.

"This fern will curl. I have a quantity that we pressed last year. You might take that to Barbara; it will help out."

"So I will. I'm glad you thought of it. But this will keep fresh some time, if damp. I'm so glad to help her!"

"Yes, I enjoy helping those who help themselves."

"Bab does that. She 's a busy little worker, and so dainty and quick. Her fingers obey her every time. She 'll be happy with so much of the country."

"You can't take more. We 'll go home and pack these nicely. I never saw such marsh flowers, so large and varied. They 'll make a fine show."

The visit to her home was delightful and refreshing to Maggie. She was met by Clare and Barbara at the station, the young artist overjoyed at such an addition to her stock in trade. After assisting her a half-hour to preserve the freshness of the plants, Clare took Maggie to the hospital and was driven home.

The rag-picker had roused somewhat in her absence. Her black eyes were open and clear when Maggie went to the bedside for a moment. They told her she had spoken a few intelligent words and understood what was said to her. It was possible she might recover.

This was no time for Maggie to think of her own interests. The woman's gaze wandered restlessly from face to face. She was free from pain but uneasy, and soon fell into a partially lethargic state. If only they could save her life and Maggie could learn who "Sal" was and the child she had in keeping! It was a slender thread to hang her hopes upon; but she did

hope, she scarcely knew for what. There was no doubt of her orphanhood. She had never expected to see any near relative. Had there been any living being to claim her she could not have been left in the cruel grasp of that woman. But might she not in some way learn more of the bright face in her keeping, the face so long hidden in the roll of clothing, unnoticed till now, and only brought from its concealment through the wild mutterings of a half-dead woman?

She said to herself she must forget her perplexity in her work. These vague longings must be stilled, this strong desire to know more of her origin must not be allowed to cripple her powers or interfere with her duty. She must be patient. So she went among the young weaklings, ministering to their wants, adding to their few pleasures, soothing their irritability, and bringing to them all the comfort and freedom from pain in her power. They were a delight to her, especially when she saw them grow a trifle stronger and happier each day. Life was worth living when she could forget herself in the happiness of others, live for those who had but a feeble grasp on life, give of her superabundant vitality to those who lacked.

So one after another of these waifs of humanity went from her, taking something of her

vigor and strength with them, their vacant places refilled with others who would tax her still more. Maggie was of heroic frame, but so perfectly proportioned that one was not at first impressed with her size. Her hands were large but symmetrical, the wrists strong and supple. She carried herself royally, with head erect, shoulders firm and square. The children felt safe in her arms, and the physicians and nurses were confident of her support in any case she undertook.

It was late in September, cool and bracing. Mrs. St. John was giving a small reception in honor of friends from abroad who were soon to return. The number must be limited, for many were still out of the city, but she wished to make the affair as interesting and delightful as she could. She wanted her friends to see the very best of American life, to meet the most agreeable people, to be entertained in the most charming way.

Among other plans she had formed for a successful entertainment was this unique style of decoration. It would serve two purposes: beautify the rooms in original and exquisite taste, and reveal to the strangers the wonderful beauty and variety of the local flora and its capacity for being utilized.

She had n't a thought that Barbara could fail,

and she was more than ready to be satisfied with even moderate success from the modest maiden she patronized; but she was unprepared for the marvellous abundance and variety of plants secured and the rare skill she showed in arranging them. Tuesday afternoon she sent the carriage for her with the baskets, and greeted her warmly when a little later she appeared, with only the vines and greens that would keep their freshness until the next evening.

Every spray was ready for its place. It only needed a footman and a step-ladder; the directions were clear and simple; and when all was arranged Mrs. St. John could only exclaim,

"It is lovely as it is, Miss Allen!"

"Please call me Barbara; no one says 'Miss' to me. It seems strange."

"What a sensitive child you are. But I shall certainly say Barbara, if I may. It has a wild nook flavor about it that is delightful. The library is beautifully trimmed already. What more *can* you do to it?"

"Not much, Mrs. St. John. The other rooms are to have the most of the blossoms. I like quiet among books, don't you?"

"Indeed yes. Though I should never have thought of it. Those vines are just the thing, and those great bunches of sumac, with only now and then a hint of autumn's glow, are most effec-

tive. Ah, Barbara, it is exquisite. And the ferns will not wilt? They are so beautifully fresh now."

"They are all in vials of water but the pressed ones, and unless closely examined one would not know the difference. I will come to-morrow with all the bright things for the other rooms."

"You have remembered the blue room up stairs?"

"Yes. I have only blue and white for that, with the tips of the red woodbine; it needs nothing more."

"Do it just as you like. It will be a poem in color. I should not dare suggest; the whole thing is restful. You have taken a burden from me, dear."

The next day Barbara finished her work to the enthusiastic satisfaction of Mrs. St. John.

It would be impossible to describe the different effects: the massing of color, the rich contrasts, the sweet thought expressed here or the cool, shady corner portrayed there. The glowing of the cardinal spikes, the modest welcoming spirit of the different gentians, the lofty sway of the great bunches of golden-rod, the fragile grace of the sweet-scented clover, the homely contented atmosphere of the asters as they sprang in great clusters here and there, the clem-

atis vine with its feathery seed-vessels looped with the unopened bitter-sweet among the draperies and hangings, all spoke of a spirit that understood the capacity of each child of nature and was willing that they speak for themselves.

It is needless to say the guests were astonished and enthusiastic. Mrs. St. John saw it was a grand success, and Barbara was rewarded liberally. She was compelled to accept far more than she wished. She was told that it was more lovely than the florists would have made it, and worth as much. "So, my little friend, you must take the same I should have given to them. Now I will send you back. I hope you are not too tired to enjoy a share in my refreshments. After a few days I shall see you again. We must be great friends." She offered her a little basket, which Barbara accepted with childlike grace. The kindness of this new friend called into her face as she rode home a new brightness and beauty. Her father was awaiting her. He looked long into her eyes, as searching for the key to her unfolding loveliness, and wondering that so precious a gift should be added to his life.

Maggie had offered to relieve the night nurse of the surgical ward, and was moving quietly from cot to cot attending to the last duties before the light was dimmed. She hoped for some

surer information from the rag-picker, but feared her mind was not clear enough to be trusted. In her first consciousness she had gone back into the past, spoke of friends and places foreign to her present life, scenes that could not have been enacted here or now. They seemed generally to recall pleasant recollections, though sometimes she shouted to "Sal" fiercely, rebuking or challenging her for some undiscoverable cause.

Maggie was glad of the opportunity to be with her and watch the singular working of this mind weakened by the shock to her system. She hoped to learn who it was she so angrily addressed. She could not approach her hastily. She must wait until health returned, and with it memory of the life she had led until the accident brought them together. She was glad to be of service in this ward, where she could watch and be ready for the opportunity that would certainly come now that the patient was improving. She went from bed to bed giving comfort to each as they needed. She was interested, active, zealous and untiring, quieting the nervous, soothing the timid, giving to one a cooling draught, smoothing a pillow for another, or with gentle monotonous motion bringing sleep to the restless. It was after midnight, when suddenly the woman rose in bed and with energy flung the clothes from her and attempted to get upon the

floor. She had been dreaming, was excited and wandering. Maggie was at her side in an instant, with arms about her, winning her gently and firmly to lie down.

"No you don't. You drunken fool! Let the brat alone. Have done, Sal."

"It 's not Sal. It 's Maggie," sounded in the woman's ear, low and clear as a bell. She brushed the gray hair back, laid her gently on the pillow, and bent over her soothing her to quiet. The woman's wild eyes were fastened on her face. She smiled back, saying,

"I am Maggie. You remember Maggie?"

"Maggie are ye? Yes, I remember. Where 's Sal?"

"She 's gone. She wont trouble you again."

"Gone, has she? Did she sink? Sal's Mag?" She gazed at her closely in a bewildered, troubled way for a few moments, then fell asleep.

For a long time Maggie sat by her in the dim light listening to the irregular, labored breath, feeling that she must still wait for the knowledge she wanted. That there was some unknown link between the patient and the dreadful creature who had been the terror of her childhood, she was sure. She prayed that the mystery might be solved—the strange meaning of her dim recollections and the treasured picture she had found revealed to her. She loved to

study the bright, intelligent face, as youthful as her own, and now her most cherished possession. Barbara was her confidant. She knew the whole story: together they bent over this face that Maggie knew was her mother's, with eyes so like her own. They must once have smiled upon her baby face; those arms had clasped her when death so strangely parted them. Would she ever know the whole? Had she a relative on earth?

She visited this ward now every day, though there was no neglect of her own. Her young convalescents were as carefully watched, her tasks as faithfully performed, and her delight in her task as real as ever. They wondered at her interest in this disagreeable case, were surprised to see her direct her steps to that particular cot, take the woman's hand, smooth the pillow, and strive to attract her attention. Soon the patient expected her, looked eagerly towards the door, and roused herself as she approached, and Maggie would smile sweetly into those restless black eyes and say in her round, full tones,

"It 's Maggie, come to see how you feel today. Better?"

The reply would be, "Maggie be it?"

One day as she came with swifter step, the woman sat up and exclaimed,

"Sal's mistress! Mrs. Doane,"

Maggie stood transfixed, with startled gaze and white face.

"Do you know me?" she asked.

"Where 's Sal? Tell her to hide. They 'll have her up," she whispered.

"What for? What has she done?"

"Hm-m-m!" she mumbled with a look of cunning that was horrible. The young girl turned quickly away. Would she ever learn the meaning of it all? Was there something more fearful than she had dreamed? She allowed several days to pass without inquiry after this, until the nurse came to her saying that her queer old patient was sitting up, improving rapidly, and asking for Maggie. They could make nothing out of her. Would she come and quiet her?

This time she took the photograph. The woman was up, sitting by her cot, her head still bandaged and her arm in a sling, a pitiable-looking object enough.

She was gazing sharply towards the entrance, in evident expectation of seeing a child, for as Maggie drew near, tall, lithe, with carriage an empress might have envied, she started, exclaiming again,

"Mrs. Doane! Alive!"

"Do n't you remember Maggie?" taking her hand and sitting close on the edge of the cot.

"Not little Mag? Sal's Mag?"

"Yes," smiling into the astonished eyes that gleamed under the rough gray brows.

"Where is Sal?"

"She is not living. She died long ago."

"Died!" The woman showed no particular feeling; there was evidently no sorrow.

Maggie drew out the picture, saying at a venture, "This is my mother. Do you know it?"

The hands clutched it wildly. She studied the face with an occasional quick look at Maggie.

"Tell me my mother's name," in a low tone of authority.

"Mrs. Doane. Yes, it be her," still looking from the picture to Maggie in a startled manner.

"Who was Sal?"

"Mrs. Doane's nurse. My man's sister."

"Yes," responded Maggie, with no sign of curiosity or desire, though she wondered the woman did not hear the loud beating of her heart.

"She nursed my mother? Very long?"

"Oh very long. Her man died. Then Sal went very far off. Your father was sick and died in the South; your mother came home."

"And then? Tell me all. You know more of course."

"Yes. The vessel sank in a great storm. Sal had you and saved you."

"And my mother?"

How tightly she was grasping the bony hand, how white her lips were, and her eyes fastened upon the old face so close to hers!

"She sank. All sank but a few. Sal held you tight. I can tell no more. You look very like. Sal was good and decent then."

"After that. Did no one claim me?"

"How?"

"Did any one ever come for me?"

"No. Sal took good care of you. *Then* she was nice and did no harm. That is all I know," shutting her lips tightly.

"Why wont you tell me all? I could do you no harm. I will not blame you for any fault of Sal. Tell me what you know; I will reward you. Think, I have never known my mother. This picture is all I have. Are you tired? Then I 'll come again by-and-by. You will rest, and tell me all another time.'

"Yes—I 'm tired. I don't know the rest. No more."

Maggie was very tender, helped her to lie down, sat by and sang low and sweet words of love and trust until the patient slept, then returned to her own ward; but every opportunity that presented found her ministering to this woman. She brought her fruit and cooling drink, dressed her wound when the other nurse was hurried, saw that she was comfortable, and was

glad to find that she depended upon her and eagerly waited for her coming.

And now a different expression appeared on the woman's face, as if she had taken a new resolve, had conquered fear and would be governed by a purer motive despite the consequences. Maggie had won her by patient kindness and gentle forbearance. She was sure the woman would eventually disclose all she knew. She seemed to be content only in her presence, to be satisfied and comfortable only when Maggie was by; but she was silent. One day, when they were quite alone, Maggie had been humming soothingly by the bed. Suddenly she asked,

"Did Sal do wrong? Did she treat me very cruelly?"

"She drank after a while, and made you beg and steal — everything. She got very drunk, was hauled up sometimes. They can't hurt her now."

"No one can hurt her; but I want to know where I was then."

"You were with me. I was very good to Maggie."

"And then she left you?"

"They took you off somewhere. I never saw you again. They sold your chain, locket, all, and drank all the time. They had beat you and

starved you, very bad. Now, you have a good home?"

"Yes, I am happy now."

"That is right. I 'm glad you 're happy."

"And you shall be happy too. I must always know where you are and help to make you comfortable."

"The Holy One bless you, little Maggie. I shall never call you Sal's now."

"No, you may call me 'Nurse Maggie.'"

"I will." And while she remained those near saw that constantly her lips moved, as though talking to one unseen by those about. They discovered that she was repeating over and over the words, "Nurse Maggie, Nurse Maggie." She slept with the name on her lips and waked to ask a blessing upon Nurse Maggie.

A long descriptive account went to Aunt Clarissa. There was still much mystery that might never be revealed. The name of Doane was unknown to the family. Miss Brainard advised Maggie to be content with the face in her keeping, and the sure knowledge that it was her mother's, and to go on bravely with her work. She threw herself into it with a zest that never abated. Her health was perfect, her strength unfailing; her devotion was given without stint, and her sunny presence held healing power for those to whom she ministered. They drew increased vi-

tality from her superabundance. They had no idea that she could fail them. Even the doctors taxed her as they would not have dared one of less courage and determination. Once there was a demand for outside nurses, and Maggie was sent on her first private mission. It was a case of diphtheria, a baby boy, very ill. Her heart thrilled as she entered the darkened room and saw the worn mother bending over the sufferer whose hold on life was so frail. She was performing with unsteady hand some necessary service. One thought for divine assistance Maggie raised to Christ, claiming his promised help. It was the recognition of his power that bathed her whole soul in love and faith. Her courage came back like a flood. He would be near. The work was his.

"Let me do it, please. Sit here and rest. I will do just as you would." The mother watched closely as she deftly performed her various duties and made the little patient comfortable. At last she prevailed upon the mother to lie down—it would be useless to advise her to leave the room. Then studying her directions, watching her little patient, lying in a sleep like death but for the painful breathing, quietly she put the room in perfect order and waited for the doctor's early visit.

The child's eyes opened. A look of fear

appeared. Maggie's smile checked it and she offered nourishment. The little hand pushed it weakly away.

"Take it, darling; it will make you well. See?" She tasted it, saying firmly, "Take it for *me*, good boy," with a smile that conquered. "Take more, dear." The child obeyed. The mother had risen and was anxiously watching every motion. With a sigh of relief she sank back, saying,

"He would n't touch it for me. He *must* take it."

"Have no fear; he will take it, I 'm sure."

Then the worn-out mother yielded to the strain of the past few days and fell into a sleep that lasted long.

This was Maggie's first independent work. In two weeks the child was well enough to be left. She had allowed it to wind itself about her very heart. Its arms clasped her tightly. The mother begged her to stay longer.

"You have saved my baby for me; I shall never forget you. I wish you could stay."

"I have my marching orders, you know, and must report as soon as I 'm not needed."

"And you cannot stay as my guest?"

"Oh dear no. I must be at work somewhere, and evidently there is no more to do here, for my boy's roses will soon be back." She kissed

him on both cheeks and held him tight until the last moment; then, promising to come again, she left them.

This was the first of a long list of loving little friends to whom she was allowed to minister. When she returned to the hospital the rag-picker had gone.

CHAPTER XV.

DOT'S OUTING.

JACK'S next year at college was a battle and a victory. His friends could ask no more. His mother regained spirits and strength with the good tidings. His two years of real work transformed him from the reckless, unthinking boy into the ambitious, earnest man.

Barbara's opportunities to develop skill and taste increased when it became known who had decorated Mrs. St. John's rooms. So great was the demand there was danger of the wild flowers being exterminated, root, stem, and blossom, but that the frost mercifully preserved the remnant even from Barbara's tender hands. She was often sought—her fine taste acknowledged, her rare ability recognized; and the charm of her sweet, retiring nature and pure integrity gained favor with all.

Two years moved smoothly away; the holidays drew near. The Hamlins were stirred up by one of Miss Brainard's lively calls. They were designated as periodical favors, and looked for with eager anticipation. She always had an object, sure to be original and surprising.

"Dolly!" she began, one early morning before removing her hat.

"Yes, Clarissa, I see it in your face. The air is full of it. You have some grand project on hand. What can it be this time?"

"Auntie, you make me think of time and tide, always."

"Tell me why, Dot."

"Because you wait for no man."

"Indeed, then, I don't. But, Dolly dear, listen, if this chatterbox can be still, and don't one of you speak until I 'm through. Give me the whole platform for five minutes; I 'm going to Florida."

There was a little shriek from Dot, a pleasant murmur from Clare, and Mrs. Hamlin opened her eyes in amazement. Aunt Clarissa raised her finger and proceeded:

"Now be still. Let me tell the whole story. I shall go the first week of the new year. I know it 's too soon to follow them up, but I 've been thinking these first years will be the longest and hardest. I might help them; at all events it will do them good to see me; and I must know how they are getting on. I can't take Maggie this time; I shall be gone three or four months. I want company. You can't go; Eric can't spare Clare, and she wont leave her work. I don't blame her. I 'd give that

dear little Bab an outing, but her father stands in the way. There 's no one left but Dot."

Here Dot performed a succession of silent gymnastics through the room that brought smiles to every face.

"I want her to go with me."

"But, sister—"

"Be patient a moment longer. I want to shut up my house, for Becky 'd die there alone, and don't you want a seamstress and general housekeeper? I shall continue her wages, of course, but must leave her happy. That is all; now you may free your minds; mine is made up."

She sat the picture of firm determination.

"I see; there 's little to say," said her sister, while Dot hugged her rapturously.

"What made you think I would not give up my study, auntie?" Clare asked a little dubiously, half wishing she were in Dot's place.

"Well, I 've been talking with Eric, and I did n't think it was best; we have another plan for you later," nodding encouragingly.

"It 's a fine idea, and I shall be glad of Becky. But what room have they for you?"

"I 've thought it all over. I 've had descriptions of the house and the whole estate until I know it all. The boys can sleep at the farm where they did when they first went. We can

take their room, and they have an extra one for Dot. I've asked a thousand questions; I intend making a confidant of Ned, and have him meet us at the nearest point of railroad travel and take us there. It will be an old springless mule wagon; but it wont hurt me any more than it did Lucy. To think that little thing never flinched; there's not one in ten so brave. And I don't mean that Harry shall get ahead of me again. I'm vain enough to think it will do them good—and me too. Now may I have Dot?"

"What can I do without her for four months?"

"Do let me go; do, mamma. I can make papa listen to reason, I know."

"Why, Dorothy, are you so eager to leave me?"

"No indeed, mother, I'm inconsolable; but I do want to go. Such a chance! I may never have another."

"What about school and music?"

"No matter about school; a rest wont hurt her. And for music, Dr. Kent lives on the lake, a near neighbor to them. They are there now. Ned says they are delightful people and have a piano. Ned is a favorite already; very likely Dot will be, if she is not too crazy. Let her go."

"Yes, mamma; I need it too. I think I had a little hacking cough this morning. Did you notice, Clare?"

"I thought you were trying to talk and eat at the same time, and there was a little want of harmony."

"Well, get papa's consent, and—"

"I have yours? You precious mother! I shall go, auntie, there is n't an atom of doubt;" and she did.

The house lost its music in her absence. The mother missed her more than any other, although Clare cheerfully gave her many hours she had devoted to other things. Becky proved a wonderful companion in the quiet sewing-room; many a quaint old tale of her early Scottish life she gave them as the work went on, and many a short, bracing ride they indulged the old servant in, knowing that she missed the stirring life of the country indoor and out.

Dot sent her first greeting from Savannah, a letter as sparkling, bright, and newsy as she could make it, full of delightful gayety, of boundless enjoyment, of enthusiastic rapture over the wonders of the ocean and the unique steamer life.

All unconscious of the surprise in store for them, Mrs. Brainard and her younger children enjoyed the charm of their simple home. They had neighbors near. Dr. Kent, whose fine place they had noticed in first passing, had returned from the North. His family was small; his

wife and mother, with servants, made up the household. Mrs. Kent was genial, hospitable, and free of speech, generous and kindly; not entirely satisfied with her secluded life, but willing to make the sacrifice for the health of her husband, she devoted herself entirely to the making an ideal home in the wilderness for him and his mother, to whom she was strongly attached. The mother was a sweet-faced, gentle woman, with a quiet air and a low, plaintive voice, that hinted at sharp trials in the past, of sacrifices made, of hopes laid aside, and perhaps a life-long struggle for patient submission to a will higher than her own. She almost invariably dressed in soft grays, and had been called by an old black woman, who must have had a touch of poetry in her make-up, "the doctor's mourning dove." She went nearly every day among the blacks and poorer whites, who freely poured their tale of joys and sorrows into her ears, receiving from her unlimited sympathy and assistance with pathetic gratitude.

Many of the whites were of the poorest. If not vicious, yet discouraged and hopeless, with scarce enough of earthly goods to make their days go on, satisfied with the meanest fare and the least that would support life. They were indolent, for they were without suitable tools for labor; ignorant, for they had never been taught;

careless, for they had nothing to care for; hardened, for life even beneath sunny skies was hard. What wonder that the quiet, friendly calls of this gentle old lady were a surprise to them! and when she added to this kindly interest more tangible offerings, making life a trifle more endurable, their apathy changed to a half-expressed wonder and then to a humble gratitude. They would at last have made some feeble exertion for her had she needed any service they were capable of rendering.

The drive from Mr. Brainard's to the Kent place was long, winding through devious ways in most promiscuous fashion, round any obstacle that presented. The distance by water could be accomplished in a few minutes' row. The families had early exchanged calls. There was little ceremony but a wealth of good feeling; in that sparsely settled region a new neighbor was a boon to be gratefully acknowledged.

Ned had spent several pleasant evenings on the doctor's veranda, rowing back as the great bright globe of the full moon, floating through thin fleecy clouds, touched the wave-crests of the lake and cast deep shadows along the shore. They were already on delightfully familiar terms. The doctor was young and enthusiastic enough to sympathize with one who had renounced his chosen work for the sake of others.

He understood his ambition. It had been his own. Nothing had interfered with the successful completion of his plans but failure in health that made a Southern life imperative. He had so far recovered as to do good work on his place and in his study.

This life of ease, this independent, out-door existence, was too delightful to break up. He was not sure that he should ever practise anywhere. If those near him needed his services they were bestowed freely. After a time he proposed a course of reading to Ned. It might be of use in the future. His library was freely offered. It would be agreeable in their isolated life to have some object beside work with the blacks. Ned accepted enthusiastically; it gave a fresh impetus to his ambition, and there was a rare good-fellowship between them. From this time, with his daily readings with the doctor and the recitations of Harry, his life was that of a student.

As fruit culture became familiar to them Mr. Brainard readily gave him more time for his books. There was a large number of negroes at work upon the place, some with families, living in small cabins on the ground, many more day laborers, with homes at a distance. A remarkably good feeling existed, a spirit of deference, a willingness to surmount obstacles, that made the work—not always light and pleasant—run

smoothly. Each family had a spot of land, and raised their own "garden truck," as they termed it; other commodities were brought in bulk and sold to them without profit, as they required. They were skilful in trapping game and cooking fish, and with their power of endurance were enabled to live far more generously than the low class of whites, whom they looked upon with scarce concealed contempt. They were docile, happy, submissive, and with an element of reverence in their nature that made them easily controlled. Their Sabbath services were held in a large shed that had been arranged with seats, near the lake, and easy of access to any desiring to reach it by land or water.

Harry had his morning and evening hours of study, between which he devoted the time to enjoyment with his sister on the beach among the pines, and even as far into the jungle as they dared venture. Sometimes a few hours were spent at the other place with Auntie, having a rough-and-tumble, madcap frolic with the young blacks who swarmed about the cabins. They had never had a gladder life. There was nothing to cramp the freedom of motion, nothing to check the delights of that endless summer.

At this time Aunt Clarissa's letter reached Ned. It was to be secret until the day before their arrival, that his mother might not weary

herself with preparation. That there might be a suitable welcome, he had confided in Auntie, enjoining the strictest secrecy and advising her to have everything ready for a first-class Northern housekeeper's comfort.

"Dat I will, sho' now, Massa Ned. A little fo'knowledge mighty 'portant to hab. Missy hab no 'casion to trouble herse'f at all."

"That 's right, Auntie. Do n't worry mother. Fix the rooms all right; make them up white and nice."

"Sho' now I will, Massa Ned. Hope to goodness I wont done go foolin' roun' an' let de secret out de bag; secrets mighty confusin', Massa Ned."

"I 'll trust you, Auntie. Do your best."

The next day the mistress looked into the cook-room in passing with the children.

"Baking, Auntie? It 's pretty warm for that."

"Done get way down on cake, missy. 'Pears like dere 's not'in' to eat when de cake-box empty."

"You must like to live in a furnace. Make me a cake, will you?" sang out Harry through the screen-door.

"Me too, Auntie," from his sister.

"Sho' now dis pusson do dat. Bof yo' chilluns gwine to hab de berry bes' ole Auntie know

how to make. Massa Harry, done go 'long look in de box an' bring me de fresh eggs dere; dose hens mighty lazy dese times. Yo' kill dat big gopher you haulin' roun' dis mornin' an' gib de hens, dey lay pow'ful."

"Will they really, Auntie?"

"'Course dey will. S'prisin' fond o' gopher meat hens is."

"I'll do it. But I'll get your eggs first. What's in the wind anyhow, Auntie? You look solemn as an owl."

"Go 'long now. I's al'ays solemn-like wif such 'portant bizness. You go help yo' ma, Massa Harry."

A few mornings after Ned announced his intention of being away for the day.

"And, little mother, I may bring company home to-night. Don't get tired; I want you to be your freshest. Let Auntie do it all; she knows."

"I felt it in the air. Who's coming?" asked Harry.

"Who is it, Ned?" asked his mother.

"I'm going to the station for Aunt Clarissa and Dot."

"Hurrah! Three times three! But that's immense!" shouted Harry.

Every face was covered with glad smiles.

"Does your father know it?"

"Yes, I 've just told him. I was afraid you 'd work yourself to death if you knew it sooner. But Auntie 's made everything first rate."

"I wondered at her energy. When shall you be back?"

"Just the time we got here from Jacksonville. Auntie will have a good dinner ready for them."

"Yes, indeed; and that 's why she was making your room so fine. I thought it was unbounded love for you."

"Not a bit. I can take Harry to the other house to sleep. Now I must be off."

"Wont it be fun! Hurrah for Dot!" again and again his exultant shout rang out.

They were nearly the same age and fairly matched. The children found it a long day for waiting. They filled the rooms with flowers; the house was turned into a bower of loveliness. Mr. Brainard was as nervous and impatient as the others. The day wore slowly on in its cloudless beauty, and late in the afternoon Ned's glad shout reached them from the hummock-road.

Harry raced down the path to open the wide gate that the travellers might ride close to the vine-covered porch. With a spring Dot was in her uncle's arms, laughing and crying in a breath. The greetings were full of gladness and tears. Old Auntie stood surveying the

group, her black face wreathed in the broadest smile, every white tooth gleaming and eyes sparkling beneath her red bandanna. She wondered if they would stop talking long enough to eat; her dinner was all ready to place on the table. Would they never get off their wrappings and partake of the feast of which she was so justly proud!

The mocking-bird in the oak near poured forth a welcome trill that hushed Dot's voice and gave an expression of rapture to her face.

Aunt Clarissa commented upon the change in each: Harry so like his father, and Kitty, with her yellow locks and big blue eyes, was wonderfully grown.

"And you and Lucy are so young and fresh! Why, she 's like a girl again. It must be a wonderful spot you 've found. Is the miraculous fountain of youth on the place? And who is this, looking as pleased as the rest of us?" she asked.

"This is Auntie, who takes care of us."

"I hope there 'll be no rivalry between the two aunts," responded Miss Brainard as she smiled at the negress' deferential courtesy.

"Come, Dot, this is your nest. Take off your hat. Here 's cool water for a splash. You are hungry, I know; you always were."

Harry was tugging in the bundles, while Dot

squeezed Kitty until the child almost gasped in surprise and delight.

"Yes, Harry, I 'm just as starved as ever, and I 'll be ready at once. What dear little rooms! one for me all by myself, and this for auntie close by. I shall be so happy. I long to see everything. Call auntie or she 'll talk till dark."

"Here, Aunt Clarissa, let me help you. Don't talk to papa any longer. Old Auntie shakes in her shoes for fear the dinner 'll spoil."

"True enough; but I 've a world to say to you all. Harry, you are the same mother-boy as ever. I 'm glad of that."

There was a merry dinner, and then they congregated upon the western veranda. The sun, a red, blazing globe, was close to the horizon; great masses of golden clouds had gathered and opened like gleaming gates upon an emerald sea; the whole heaven, even to its eastern limit, was aglow; the lake at their feet reflected every form and shade.

They gathered in groups. Dot drew Kitty into the hammock, chattered and told stories full of fun and sparkling with gayety. Harry laughed long and loud. The elders turned to smile on the merry group. Kitty was brimming over with life. It was grand to have another playmate and one who could throw herself so heartily into her fun as Dot did.

"Cousin Dot, I love you, oh so much; as much as I do Harry almost!"

"You precious child, I love you too! And to think I have n't seen you since you were a baby! We 'll have the jolliest times, wont we?"

"Yes, indeed. I did n't think you were so playrious."

The merriment was contagious. Ned caught his little sister, perched her on his shoulder, and cantered up and down the walk between the limes, then tossing her into his father's arms, told Harry they must go before it was too dark to see the path. The short twilight was past; a stillness reigned that could be felt. Very soon Dot was dreaming in her tiny room.

The next day the delights of a Southern winter among friends began for the guests. Ned's studies for a time were discontinued. The Kents made early calls, and a delightful intimacy sprang up between the families. Harry taught Dot to row, and many an hour was spent on the lake. She charmed them with her glad nature. Never quiet, never silent, she sang as the birds did, needing no accompaniment; simply to pour her whole soul upon the still air in tones that charmed every listener was her highest joy. She loved to row out into the centre of the lake with one or both her cousins and throw song after song into the night air, the full moon

covering her with a silvery light. Her voice was full, strong, and rich, the higher tones of rare purity. They never wearied of listening or she of singing. Soon the negroes were attracted, and as she poured forth rich floods of music a rustling near the hummock-road would reveal a crowd of blacks listening in rapt attention to the exultant tones.

The doctor's grounds were extensive, and for some distance about the house were in a high state of culture. Gravel walks led to the lake and to the road. The air was heavy with the scent of jasmine, and roses bloomed continually in great abundance and of many varieties. Fragrance and beauty surprised one at every turn. The almost endless tropical growth filled Dot with amazement. She became at once a favorite with the family. Her happy spirit readily won friends, and her fresh, young, cultivated voice was a rich treat to all who heard it.

Mrs. Kent had guided the music on the Sabbath and was very willing to accept the assistance Dot could give. They offered her the freedom of the music-room and encouraged frequent visits. The two families soon became almost as one, together at some part of each day. The mother would sit by the hour listening as the young girl lost herself in the art she loved.

On one of these occasions, while Harry fished

from the boat-landing and Kitty was frolicking with the doctor's setter, Dot, thinking herself alone, indulged in a wild medley of everything she could recall that she had ever learned, finishing with some of the gospel hymns she had so often sung for the patients in the hospital at home. At last the music ceased, and swinging round on the stool Dot found she was not alone. Mother Kent, as they all called her, had been listening with her knitting lying idly in her lap, her hands folded, and her soft gray shawl dropping to the floor. "How sweet she looks," thought Dot, "with her eyes the color of heaven, so far off. I wonder what she is thinking about."

"Come here, my child," she said.

Dot pulled a stool near and seated herself at the old lady's feet..

"Your voice is a wonderful gift, my dear." Dot looked into her face with a light, glad laugh. It made her happy; she had no other thought. "Have you ever thought why such a gift should be yours?" Mrs. Kent smiled upon the bright face.

"Why, no, I never did," she answered slowly. "Perhaps it 's because I can't do anything else. I don't know much. I shall never know as much as Clare."

"Your sister?"

"Yes; she 's most an angel, but I 'm a madcap, they say. I can only sing; and how I love it!"

"Well, dear, it 's a rare gift. God gave it. He has been very good to you, giving you what you love so much."

"Why, so he has. But he is good to all, you know."

"Yes; we shall never know here *how* good. If I were you I would consecrate this gift to him while it is fresh and beautiful."

"I wish I could; but how? I can only sing and sing. What more *can* I do?"

"Do you sing for love of Him, dear?"

"Oh, dear Mrs. Kent, I 'm afraid it 's only because I love to sing, as the birds do."

"But you have higher powers than the birds. To-morrow is the Sabbath. We all go to the little church on the lake; a poor place, but I mean it shall be better. You will go and sing, not for yourself, but to His glory who gave you this voice. Shall it be so?"

"Will He like me to?"

"Assuredly, as much as he likes the adoring music of the seraphim."

"I 'm glad you told me; now I shall like it better."

They sat together silent for a while—one near the sunset of life, the other with holier thoughts than she had ever known before.

The next morning the long shed open to the lake was filled; the blacks at one end sitting close upon the benches, young children packed at their feet, where a warning toe could be administered if they were too restless during the service. The whites were by themselves at the other end. Ned had arranged a few camp-chairs outside for the ladies of the two households in the shade of live oaks covered with festoons of gray moss. Harry and Kitty occupied stools beside a huge fallen tree, which gave them an easy support, close by their cousin. A few dogs crouched quietly near their masters. Mrs. Kent placed a small vase of brilliant bloom beside the Bible upon the pastor's stand.

He was a young man doing missionary work in that county, had spent the night before at the doctor's, and came with them across the lake. It was a rough place of worship, a primitive gathering, quiet, reverent, and worshipful. The services were simple and earnest. The young pastor spoke in a language suited to them, taking them with him into the presence of the Master he loved. They were but children of a larger growth and followed as he led. His voice was clear and distinct, his words plain and easily comprehended. He prayed as being one with them, needing the same help, desiring the same gifts, stooping to their capacity or raising them

through his sympathy and the divine love to a higher level than they could have reached alone. The short sermon was easy to remember and use in their daily lives until he should come again in two weeks.

They sang many times. It was a part of the worship they enjoyed with their whole hearts, in which they could all join. They poured out their sorrows with almost unconscious pathos and their gladness in jubilant measure. The first hymn after the sermon was, "Knocking, knocking, who is there?" and every voice rang out, at first like a startled cry, and then merging into the tender pathetic melody of the reply:

"But the door is hard to open,
For the weeds and ivy-vine,
With their dark and clinging tendrils,
Ever round the hinges twine."

Through it all, above and beyond the fulness of the multitudinous voices, rose one clear ringing note, like the song of a lark soaring above the crowd, piercing with richest melody the blue of heaven.

"Knocking, knocking. What, still there?
Waiting, waiting, grand and fair."

The birdlike voice trembled and faltered. Dot's eyes, with more thought than they had ever held before, caught Mrs. Kent's gaze fixed lovingly upon her. Did the Saviour look into

the girl's heart through his servant's adoring eyes?

"Yes, the piercéd hand still knocketh,
And beneath the crownéd hair
Beam the patient eyes so tender
Of thy Saviour waiting there."

She had sung this many times before without these strange feelings; what could they signify? Why was the merry, careless girl so strangely moved? The simplicity and beauty of the place, the fervor of the blacks, the weary longing in some of the faces of the poor whites, the children's high treble, the wildness of the whole scene, so far from home, so unlike anything she had ever before experienced, suddenly overcame this joyous nature. Perhaps the tender, spiritual face of the old lady recalled her words of the day before.

Whatever the cause matters not. Dot saw in the past a life of thoughtless selfishness; her eyes filled, her lips quivered, she could sing no more. She felt unworthy to join with these humble, reverent worshippers. Though familiar with Bible truth and often impressed with its divine power, she had never so felt the Saviour's claim upon her life and upon this precious gift of song that she had so rejoiced in, had so thanklessly received and used.

It should be his now. She was sure she could never sing again without remembering

the divine source of the gift. With an impulsive motion she threw back her head in the old glad style, dashed her tears away, and looked into the old lady's eyes with such a commingling of consecration and genuine humility that a smile of recognition lighted the sweet, saintly face. The two were servants of the same Master, daughters of the same King.

CHAPTER XVI.

MOTHER KENT.

"LUCY, there 's a boat on the lake, only one person in it. I should think it was a woman alone."

"Yes; it 's Mother Kent on her mission among the blacks of the other place. Some one is ailing perhaps. They are very kind to them, and I think that is one great reason of the easy government; Harry has had very little trouble with them. They have a kind of superstitious reverence for the old lady."

"Is her son crazy to allow her to come over that water alone? Is it safe?"

"It would n't be for me, but she often rows; it 's her short cut to the settlement. The people look upon her as their guardian spirit. All their vexations and ailments are poured out to her; while the poor whites on the other side of the place depend upon her to settle all their difficulties, nurse their sick, and provide their necessities when they are too feeble or improvident. She does it all with the loveliest spirit."

"That boat moves along quietly enough. Do you never have sudden storms?"

"Later in the year they come in great force and beauty. You should see one. It was a new experience to me."

"They are fine?" Miss Clarissa asked absently. She was watching the boat on the lake with evident anxiety.

"Terrific sometimes; oftener a short downpour that floods the earth and is quickly absorbed by the sandy soil, and freshens everything wondrously. Even a short shower comes with a pleasant rush and abundance that means business, but the real tempest comes after days of stifling heat, comes in power, like a conquering, overwhelming force. The atmosphere is parched and burning. One prays for rain to cool the lifeless air. The sky, like a vast canopy of heated metal, scorches everything. Then the clouds gather thick and fast, hanging low and black, lightning flashes in a continuous sheet of flame, and the reverberations are increasing, crashing over your head with a din that is frightful. The forest bends and sways and groans; the great branches twist and crash and break. The floods pour down, blotting every object out of view; you lose sight of garden, grove, and hummock. Our pretty lake is a seething, angry volcano. You are glad of the rain; you can breathe again, and before your terror is well over the clouds have parted, great patches of

blue come out, the sun struggles through the last big drops and the whole world laughs with its well-washed face, crowned with the beautiful bow of promise. You must stay long enough, Clarissa, to see a genuine summer shower."

"I mean to stay until Maggie can have a good rest. She will come in February I hope. Lucy, that boat is surely coming here."

"So she is; I'll run down and help her fasten it. Just pull out another rocker."

The gentle old lady had evidently changed her course and drawn up to the Brainard landing. The two ladies secured the boat and turned towards the house. There was no air stirring, not a ripple on the lake. Aunt Clarissa, on the veranda, expressed admiration in her face and her welcome by her lips.

"I'm very glad to see you, Mrs. Kent. But your mode of travel looks to me like tempting Providence. Sit here and rest; your arms must ache."

She could not conceal her perturbation at the apparent risk.

"No, I am not tired; it is our best and quickest way to get about."

"But alone. How dare you?"

"The boat is safe, easy to propel, and my arms are pretty strong for an old lady. But I don't always row myself; to-day the men were

busy and my son had his pupil with him. I would n't disturb them."

"Ned shows a worthy determination to press on. The doctor is more than kind to assist him."

"He may not be quite unselfish; we like contact with the young in our long, lonely days. I started out to see some of the negroes, but you looked so comfortable among the vines I could n't resist running in. Where are the young people?"

"Gone home with Auntie. She has an old sister who is feeble. Your son has her in charge."

"Yes, old Auntie Phillis."

"Dot was eager to go with her; she thinks she has never seen anything quite so comical as the crowd of young blacks at the cabins. But they are coming; I hear voices in the woods."

"Well they *are* having a merry time, to be sure," exclaimed Aunt Clarissa, as the noisy party issued from the dense growth which entirely concealed from the house the path which had been cleared through the hummock into the low coarse grass that here and there tufted through the tawny sand.

A shout of greeting went up for the ladies on the veranda. Kitty was riding on a well-taught mule; long strands of gray moss had been wound about her broad straw hat, and falling back

mingled with her flaxen locks; vines and wreaths were scattered over the child and the head of the mule who, unlike the traditional members of the tribe, was very docile and obedient. He was led by a colored boy, whose anxious desire to please the child gave to his face a touch of gravity and wise foresight that might have descended through the ages from him whose name he bore. Solomon was about twelve, sturdy, strong, and black as ebony. His brother Andrew, a little in front, and somewhat younger, was tugging a basket of eggs and fowl for Auntie. Harry and Dot followed, picturesquely laden with blossoms—great purple spikes, bunches of the yellow bloom of the cactus, and long vines of the abundant wild passion-flower with its delicately tinted bloom.

"See me, mamma!" called Kitty gleefully.

"See! Make him gallop, Sol; tell Andy to get out the way. Andy, go ahind! We 's going headwards now."

The obedient Andy, showing through a broad, good-natured grin magnificent rows of ivory, halted and stepped one side that Kitty might lead the way to the house.

"That child will never learn to use the English language among these natives, Harry."

"We ought to be more careful, that 's a fact; but she 's having her own sweet will here, and thrives on it—little barbarian."

"There 's Mother Kent!" cried Dot delightedly. The old lady heard and gave her a happy, welcoming nod.

Kitty called for Harry to lift her down.

"I kin hist little missy off right smart."

"No, no, Harry 's strong. You are n't muscly, Sol."

"How is your sister, Auntie?" inquired Mrs. Kent.

"Mercy sake, Missy Kent, pears like ole Phyllis gits wus all de time. She do cough dat bad pears like it break 'er all ter fiddle-strings. Mighty porely. Doctor done gon' on 'nudder 'scription. I reckon he 's got mighty serus hopes 'bout her 'covery. I tells 'er she 's pooty old for dis worl' anyway. I likes to 'courage her; an' when she gits all well she be better, dat 's a fact."

She went round the corner of the house with her basket and two boys to the kitchen, gave each a large piece of sweet-cake, and waved them off.

"Dere now, you two chilluns, git' long home wid yer. Don' yer be hangin' roun' de fambly. Kyent waste no mo' time; I calculate the doctor's ole mudder 'll be here to dinner. Yo boys git along. Hear, Sol?"

Satisfied that no more cake would be forthcoming, with a species of whoop, mingling thanks and farewell, they sprang, agile as

monkeys, to the mule's back, Andy behind his brother, his feet standing out at right angles each side the animal, while Sol's elbows as he flourished the rawhide took the same general direction, flapping like grotesque wings as the mule clumsily galloped back and was lost in the forest.

Mrs. Kent remained to dinner, Dot promising to sing everything she knew and to introduce her to all their family pictures, while Harry assured her he would row her safely back before the twilight vanished.

"Dot, ask Auntie to make us a little cool lime-water; then you can bring the box of home pictures. Will you, dear?"

"Yes, Aunt Lucy. Come, Harry, we can make the lemonade and not trouble Auntie. She 's way off in the garden, poor old thing! Let 's help her. She 's picking strawberries, I do declare. She 'll never get enough in the world; you go help. I 'll take the drink to Aunt Lucy, then I 'll come. Old Auntie means to surprise us with the first berries. She 's the best old creature I ever saw."

They carried out the plan, left the ladies chatting over the cool beverage, and to old Auntie's delight offered her their assistance.

"Yo' see, Massa Harry, dese berries done git 'spectably ripe. Plenty fo' yo' dinner. Massa

Ned hab his head so deep in de books he dis-'members de garden altogether. We 'sprise him, sho 'nuff."

"Why didn't you keep the boys to pick for you, Auntie? It 's too hot work for you."

"Ya, ha! How many yo' 'spose dere be lef'? Dat Sol done git ten in de mouf an' one in de basket every time."

"Why, do they steal like that? the little scamps."

"Well, missy, dey don' rightly call it stealin'. Dey nebber steals out 'n out. Dey means all right. De Lord knows dat jes' as well 's we does. He nebber lays a few berries up 'gainst 'em."

"Well, let them work and earn, not take what does n't belong to them."

"Don' yo' nebber hear, Massa Harry, how de good Lord do help dose dat help demselbs? Dey 's honest inside, on'y helpin' demselbs like, as de Lord say."

"Oh, Auntie, you know better."

"Dat 's a fac. Now yo' chilluns take dis fruit right in. Yo' face, Miss Dot, de bery color o' dem. Yo' mus' go in. I 'll get the 'maters an' yo' go long. I 's mighty thankful to yo' boff."

Dot bathed and cooled her face before going again upon the veranda. Harry helped his mother arrange the table; such a mother-boy he

was, she depended upon him as if he had been a girl. There was, however, nothing effeminate about him; he was a noisy, rollicking boy, full of courage, activity, and manliness. Not studious as Ned had been, too full of play for that; not averse to adventure, and having been subjected to more than one hairbreadth escape; rushing into any scene of danger and daring that presented, but willing to listen to advice, and never refusing instant obedience to rightful authority. These qualities made him very dear to his mother. She gave him her perfect trust, and that caused him to be reliable, to be worthy of the confidence placed in him.

She would never have needed the advice given to a young mother by her revered pastor, who had shown remarkable skill in training and influencing boys and young men. "Whatever else you do," he had said, "don't nag your boys." It was a timely hint. Homes would be happier if all mothers knew and would remember it. Give the boys a chance to develop rightly under the mother-love. Let them frolic and play and effervesce to their hearts' content. Give the young coltish spirits headway, under a wise, almost imperceptible control; no matter how long the life or how varied, the one brightest spot in it will be childhood's home.

"You must see my father and mother first,

Mrs. Kent. And here 's Uncle Eric, papa's brother."

"Much younger, is he not?"

"Oh ever so much. There were several between them, but they died. Uncle Eric is a grand playfellow. He teaches Clare everything, from bicycling to conic sections."

"And whose quiet face is this? There 's character there."

"That 's Clare, my only sister. How I wish she were here! She 's auntie's girl, named for her; they are much alike."

"I thought you must be auntie's girl, or why did she choose you for travelling companion?"

"It was simply a matter of convenience. Clare could n't leave her work with Uncle Eric very well, and Maggie was in training for a nurse. I was the only one left. I came in a kind of Jack-at-the-pinch way."

"And who is Maggie? It 's a precious name to me; my youngest sister was called Margaret."

"Where is she?" asked Dot.

"She was lost at sea, my dear, years ago. Who is your Maggie?"

"Auntie's adopted niece, Maggie Brainard. I 'll find her picture. She 's training for a nurse in the hospital. Auntie!" she called to Miss Clarissa, who had followed her sister to offer services, which were not needed.

"Yes, Dot."

"Where is your picture of Maggie?"

Miss Clarissa stepped back to her room and returned with a fine likeness of the young girl. She made a striking picture, her form finely developed, her abundant hair well arranged to show to advantage a shapely head, and brilliant black eyes looking one directly in the face.

"This is my girl, Mrs. Kent. I expect her here the last of February to go back with us."

"That will be delightful; we can't have too many young people in our seclusion." She took the photograph in her hand, looked at it in a startled manner, then fixed a long troubled gaze upon Miss Brainard's face and turned again to the picture in her hand. Dot was absorbed in her lapful of cards of various sizes, but Miss Brainard was perplexed and confused by the old lady's peculiar emotion.

"This! *Your* girl! Yours! Why, Miss Clarissa, it is my young sister, lost in the ocean. Where—where did you get it? My sister Margaret."

Miss Clarissa was startled, Dot confused, imagining the little old lady had lost her mental balance. For a moment they gazed silently in her face, flushed and quivering with excitement.

"Where did you get this picture, Miss Brainard?"

"Mrs. Kent, tell me your sister's name; perhaps I can explain the likeness."

"It is her face, her very self. I am the oldest of seven; she was the youngest, fifteen years between us. My mother died at her birth, my father a few years after. She was as a child to me. Her name was Margaret. She married Henry Doane, whose health, never firm, gave way under business pressure, and he was sent South. I never saw her after that. He died at St. Augustine among strangers, leaving her with a young child and its nurse. As soon as she could she took passage in a sailing vessel, whose captain had shown a friendly interest in her husband, and who was going direct to Boston. Ah I know little more; they never entered port; only rumors reached us of the loss of such a vessel, none saved; no details ever reached us. We waited, hoped, and prayed, until weeks slipped into months and years; she never came. And this—this is her face. Excuse me, it is almost exact. I have a portrait of my Margaret in my room. You shall see it. But this? Are you sure it is your child?"

"I think I can explain, Mrs. Kent. But you will be calm? I believe my Maggie is your sister's child, and my adopted niece."

"Saved?" whispered the old lady.

"Yes, dear Mrs. Kent, saved with the Irish nurse who, finding the mother lost, kept the child."

She then told the story as we know it. Mrs. Kent's face had been almost an ashy white at the first shock, but as incident after incident was related as quickly as possible, for Miss Brainard feared the result of the excitement upon one so frail looking, the flush came back until her cheeks were suffused with a pink glow and her gentle eyes almost flamed.

The gentlemen came in the midst of the recital, and it must be repeated. They could scarcely credit the strange development. The dinner was like to prove a failure for the dear old lady, until Auntie came in with a tiny cup of fresh tea, saying,

"Pears like de doctor's mou'nin' dove gits pow'ful 'cited, so much dis 'lapidated talk. Tak' yo' tea fus', den yo' wont git so upsot."

It had the happy effect of turning the tide. Ned called Harry from the table where they were enjoying their first real feast of strawberries—Auntie's surprise—and told him to row over to the doctor's and ask him to come back with him, as there was news for them, but to explain nothing.

In half an hour they were all established

again upon the veranda, the younger members on the dry grass below, but all deeply interested in the strange story. As it progressed Dot left her cousins and drew a stool to Mrs. Kent's side; this new friend held a strange attraction for the impulsive girl.

The doctor could hardly credit the story; but the name, the face, so like the portrait in his mother's room, the marked clothing, and perhaps the vague memories of Maggie, verified the wondrous tale. Mrs. Kent was in a state of nervous excitement entirely new to her son, who found himself watching her with considerable anxiety.

Miss Clarissa saw that even though she seemed to come and go as she listed, it was not without his watchful care and full assurance of her safety. She had been a devoted mother to this only son, and in this, her quiet old age, the loving solicitude was but reversed. He noted every varying shade in her face as question and answer followed each other—the bright spots of color in the usually pale cheeks, the excited gleam in the eyes always calm, the indignant, close-shut lips as Maggie's early trials were hinted at, the tears that started at the picture of Clare and Dot's dressing her for a share in the Christmas-tree, the trembling hand with its delicate blue veins that caressed Dot's head lean-

ing lovingly against her; and the grateful look upon Aunt Clarissa as she spoke of her love for the girl and her consent in allowing her to take up the work of nurse at the hospital.

It was an hour of intense interest. Ned sat like one entranced, not a word escaped him. Harry, with bright eyes and mouth puckered into a silent whistle, occasionally vented his excitement in a boyish exclamation. Kitty was asleep in the hammock, forgotten by all. The doctor broke the charm by telling them the moon was low, and they must start at once if they would be lighted on the way.

"I must have her here, Miss Brainard; I must see her." Mother Kent's voice quivered and broke.

"You shall, God willing. I will send and hasten her coming. But we 'll tell her nothing until she is here, I think."

"That is best, Miss Brainard. Come, come, mother; I shall have you down with nervous prostration if you stay another minute. We 'll have the little Maggie, be sure. We must respect Miss Brainard's claim, but I believe she 'll share with us. Come, wife, fold mother in her shawl and bring her along; I 'll run on and get the boat ready."

They all went to the beach, and while the good-nights were passing the doctor whispered

to Dot to sing something to soothe his mother's excitement as they rowed.

"What shall it be?"

"Anything. The sound of your voice does her good; I never saw her so moved."

As they pulled out into the silver line of the moon's reflection Dot's voice rang out sweet, clear, and beautiful, filling the silence with melody that had its effect upon every heart, soothing, quieting, and bringing a restful faith that could not doubt the guiding hand divine in every believer's life.

CHAPTER XVII.

STOOPS TO CONQUER.

GREAT preparation was being made in the home of the Millers. Knowledge of it had crept abroad among the many flattering friends that the young heiress was approaching another birthday and was to make merry with her favored friends in profuse and elaborate style.

It was to be the most select and elegant gathering of the season. Rooms were already being engaged at the hotels for guests from a distance. Nothing that the most cultivated taste could desire or the most capricious will demand or unlimited wealth supply would be wanting. It was to be Nellie's grand triumph. She was to take her place in society as a leader in the world's gayety. It was her highest ambition. Her whole education had aimed at this result. The mother had asked for nothing higher for this only child, and she was satisfied.

Twenty years of life her child had danced away, with sips of evanescent delight here and there, as a heedless butterfly flutters from one bloom to another, seeking fresher sweets, soon cloyed, and sinking drowsily upon the last frail-stalked flower.

It was drawing near, this grand climax. The hours were full of anticipation, like glowing golden lines converging to one bright point, the most brilliant of her life.

But one desire as yet remained ungratified, simplest of all the costly preparations, and yet she had failed to compass it, had scarcely dared propose it to her mother, who was so bitter in her dislikes and strong in her prejudices. Mr. Miller, in his good-natured ignorance of their petty jealousies and weak vanities, hastened the matter by asking one evening about the floral decorations for the all-important occasion.

"I should like to know who arranged the flowers at the McArthurs and the Athertons; they were very artistic and very unlike," responded the wife. "I would like to engage the same florist."

"I do n't believe you could, mamma."

"And, pray, why not?"

"Because this florist, or artist as she is called, works only for friends. She is in great demand since Mrs. St. John picked her up; there 's a perfect craze over her."

"Money will do everything. Who is she?"

"I wish we could engage her. No one can do it as she does, and I do want everything perfect—a little better than any other, mamma."

"I know, and so it shall be; you shall be satisfied. Where is this woman to be found? I'll engage her at once."

"Well, mamma, I hardly think so. It's Barbara Allen, my old school enemy; and no amount of money would prevail upon her to do it for me."

"Nonsense, Nellie," said Mr. Miller. "If you mean that nice little girl that found May for us, you mistake her. She's a little lady; treat her like one. If she does such work for others she will for you, or I lose my guess."

"I wish she would. No one can do it as she does; everybody is enraptured with her taste. I don't know where she got it, I'm sure. Her father's nobody but a workman."

"That proves nothing, Nell; there are artistic workmen. You may have made a sad blunder."

"Well, I don't care, papa. I never liked the way Clare Hamlin and Etta took her up; it just disgusted me. What use is there of different grades of society if the lines are totally ignored? So we were never friendly, and I suppose it's useless to ask her to do it for me."

"I shall go to her at once and pay her anything she asks, only it must be her very best."

"You had better let Nellie see her about this matter."

"Why so?" asked his wife sharply.

"Oh girls know the ins and outs of girl nature. I have an idea she would do it for her. But I would say nothing of remuneration, Nell, at first."

Mr. Miller very shrewdly divined the obstacles in the way and advised accordingly. He had a pleasant remembrance of the sweet face at his door after that night of fruitless search, of the gentle, noble bearing as she declined his reward for what she had gladly done. She would still be willing to spend and be spent in conquering an unworthy spirit.

"Well, Nellie, we 'll go together. I 'll remain in the carriage and let you bargain with her. But don't fail; I 'm determined to have this reception of yours eclipse any and all others."

It is needless to say that Nellie did not anticipate her part in the programme with any satisfaction or even hope of success; but she must not allow any obstacle, even one so insignificant as Barbara, to stand in the way of the perfect result she wished to accomplish. Therefore in one of her many elegant costumes and with the grace so natural and easy, she stood the next morning before Mr. Allen's door.

A flush of surprise tinged Barbara's cheek as she recognized her caller. She felt an impulse to

welcome her in the old eager, schoolgirl fashion, but not daring to risk a repulse she quietly invited her in, saying,

"I 'm glad to see you, Nellie. Will your mother come in also?"

"No, Barbara, it 's only a matter of business. I want you to do something for me. I wonder if you would?"

"Why, gladly, Nellie. What can I do?"

"Well, I must say, Barbara, it 's very good of you to be willing. I shall be so glad and thankful too. I want you to arrange the flowers for my birthnight. Will you?"

"If I can—"

"Oh I know you can. I don't forget your success with flowers; and I want this to be quite unlike any other—just perfection, stunning as you can make it, you know. I will provide anything to make it just right. May I depend on you?"

"I will try."

There was no buoyancy of tone, no enthusiasm such as marked her responses to other like requests. She had not failed to read the selfishness of Nellie's desire. It would not have been human for her to put away a shade of vexation. Nellie was not too blind to see it.

"It will make me very happy to have you do it, Barbara, and I want your very best."

"You shall have it, Nellie."

"Thank you. It 's ever so nice in you."

There were a few more arrangements to make and they parted.

"Bab," said her father at night, "I wont have you do it. Work for your friends, my girl, if you choose. I can't have you subjected to her caprice."

"I have promised, father dear. I don't think they can harm me. I will do it for her. It may be well."

He stood and looked down tenderly upon this child of his love. Why had he not been able to give her all the adornments of life that other girls were dowered with? Why had he not, with his great strength, his endurance, overcome all obstacles, as some men do, and given her wealth and position? His love was as fervent, his desires as far-reaching. He had the same ambitions, he fought the same fight.

For a while he held her gaze, then turning, said sadly, "Circumstances are against us, Bab."

"Why, father, what do you mean? You must not talk so. Providence is for us, and that is best."

"You may be right. I don't like to have my girl take a servile position towards that beflummeried piece of importance."

Barbara's merry laugh pealed out.

"I shall not be servile; but I love to be helpful. You know mother's motto, 'Not to be ministered unto'—"

"'But to minister.' Yes, nothing but that reconciles me to her audaciousness in asking you. But don't take her money, Bab; it would scorch me."

"No, father; I'll do it for love's sweet sake."

The evening came. The sifting light streamed through the opened doors, threw back reflected gleams from polished stairway and rich dark mouldings, heavy tapestries of artistic tints concealed or revealed room after room of elaborate finish, soft carpets welcomed eager feet, luxurious cushioned lounges invited repose, great vases filled with fragrance graced the étagères; brightness and beauty reigned.

For once Nellie's satisfaction was at white heat. She was enchanted. She exclaimed rapturously to Barbara,

"You have outdone yourself! I never saw anything so beautiful as you have made every spot in the house! Will you add to the kindness one favor still?"

She was very winning in her beauty and this new, beseeching grace she had adopted towards her humble friend.

"What is it, Nellie?"

The lady winced a little at the familiarity, but there was too much at stake to resent it.

"Will you stay and arrange the dresses and flowers for the ladies as they come in? You will do it so much better than the girls. They are clumsy and your touch is just right."

She waited for a reply. It did not come at once. There was a glow in Barbara's face deep as the heart of a rose. Could she do it? "I am to minister; what matter how?" she thought, when Nellie asked again doubtfully,

"You will, Barbara?"

"I will stay; yes."

"You *are* kind."

Nellie was sincere now. It was late in coming, but she felt Barbara's claim to something above cold thanks.

One after another the maidens submitted to her dainty fashioning of their adornments without a thought but that she was a nice little servant-maid and did her work with exquisite skill. Where could the Millers have found her?

Etta came in with a breeze, threw off her loose garment, and stood bewildered to see her little friend in that house.

"Why, Babette! How strange! What does it mean? Has Nell forgiven you for existing?"

"I am here to make you look your prettiest for the festivities below; and you are late."

"Yes, I had a long story for Hale. But I can't believe it. Did Nell ask you to do this? How perfectly audacious! I have a mind to go home."

"But it 's my chosen work; why should I not do it? Come, let me help you and drive you off. I must go soon. I think you are the last, perhaps."

"Bah! It takes my pleasure all away."

"No need of that. Will Clare come?"

"I do n't think so, and I hope she wont. She 'd be raging at Nell's impudence."

"There, there, go on. You look lovely!"

"'*Look!*' You *are* lovely!"

Barbara never before worked as she had the last week; and now, tired, excited, with nerves unstrung, she drew away from the light into a dim side room for a few moments of rest before going home.

Nellie had done all she thought necessary for her comfort; had furnished generous refreshments, of which Barbara could not partake, had begged her to rest all she could consistently, and assured her the carriage would be ready any moment to convey her home.

Ah she was so weary! She sat upon a lounge in the corner; her head dropped upon the pillows. It was so restful. She could look into the bright dressing-room beyond, all bestrewn

with the rich furs and warm wrappings of the guests. They waved before her tired eyes like the changing colors of a kaleidoscope. The far-off music reached her; the murmur of glad tones, the hum of many voices swept up the broad stairway. Processions of lovely young girls bearing wonderful flowers floated before her closed eyes; she was dreaming. The servants passed back and forth.

"Poor little thing," they said, "she 's used up!"

No one disturbed her. Instead of going to the father who waited impatiently for her coming, she slept on.

Presently a terrific shriek rent the air and awakened her. Her eyes opened instantly upon a sea of flame. The heavy lace draperies of the large double window of the dressing-room were ablaze, and Nellie stood beneath them horror-stricken. The flames ran up like a flash; they smouldered in the heavier lambrequins, stayed for a moment by the thick silken stuff. Barbara woke in an instant, every faculty alive, every muscle obedient. With a bound she was in the room, snatched at the draperies, tore them from their support, crushed and rolled them among afghans, shawls, anything she could grasp. She wrung and trampled them under foot until the blaze was subdued. Then she

glanced at Nellie. The girl was paralyzed by fear; she had not moved. Her gauzy dress had caught on the side, and a single jet of flame was creeping up the skirt.

"Lie down, Nellie, lie down!" Barbara seized a fur-lined garment large and loose, folding it quickly close about her bare neck and arms, pulled her upon the carpet, and with eager effort extinguished the blaze. Nellie was like a log in her hands; she was insensible. Her life seemed to have gone out in that first shriek of horror which had startled the house. The guests in the supper-room listened with inquiring glances and awe-struck faces. What had happened?

"That was Nell! Where is she?" asked her father. In another moment he was up the stairs, through the halls into the pretty room, soiled and blackened now, and Nell, his Nell, lying helpless, rolled up like a bale of goods, and the little artist on the floor beside her, sobbing.

"What is it, Nellie? Get water. Don't stand gaping there like idiots!" he cried to the terrified maids.

Barbara looked up; she waved her hands in the air as though to cool them.

"She is not burned, Mr. Miller; it is fright."

"Barbara Allen! How happened it? There, Nellie, wake up, child; you are safe, thank God."

He was bathing her face.

"Better now? And you? You saved her life, Barbara; God bless you! What might it not have been!"

Barbara rose and staggered towards the little room where her outer garments had been left. Her strength had vanished. She was waving both hands; she longed to get home. It was Etta's arm about her, Etta who was putting on cloak and hat, who sent for Burr to get the carriage and be all ready to go with her, who took the trembling girl down and went with her out to the carriage, saying,

"Go with her, Burr. I 'm afraid her hands are burned; take her home quickly."

"Only put me in, Burr; I can go alone; really I do n't need you."

"Well, we 're going, anyway, both of us," answered Jack, who had come up, adding, "You poor little martyr, are you burned?"

"My hands a little, that is all."

"All! And this is your reward? Burr, just dash into that druggist's and get a jar of vaseline." It took but a moment, and they were soon at home.

Etta went back to find Nellie hysterically inclined, with a group of sympathizers about her. She could only remember that she left the refreshment room to rearrange a stray braid that

troubled her. A maid had opened the window and forgotten to close it; the curtains blew in her face; she hastily gave them a fling, a gust of wind, aided by the impulse of her motion, sent the lace over the jet. It caught; she remembered nothing more.

"Barbara saved you, Nellie. See, your dress is a cinder. A moment, and you would have been enveloped past help. Where is the little thing? I must see her. Was she hurt?"

Barbara had gone. Etta answered with a tinge of bitterness,

"Her hands were burned, I don't know how much. She'd die before she'd complain."

"Cruel! Who went home with her?" asked Mr. Miller. "I hope some one looked out for her."

"My brother and Jack took her home; I would have gone myself, but she couldn't wait for me."

Mr. Allen was waiting. She had never been so late before. He was impatient and anxious.

"My little girl!" was all he could say.

She tried to smile bravely back, but his look of distress and unutterable love overcame her. Great tears rolled over her face.

It was Jack with his skilful manipulations that from the soft cotton made for each burned

finger a bed of cooling, healing vaseline and bound the hands safely from the air. Jack and Burr ministered to her until she grew calm and could tell the little she remembered.

"Well, my girl, you 'll have nothing more to do with the lady."

"Oh, father, do n't blame Nellie for my hands. Think, if I had not been there! And, father dear, are n't you glad I could 'minister'?"

"Heaven bless you!"

The young men said good-night, Jack offering to come in any time before he went back to his work and help her. Mr. Allen shook hands with both and thanked them, saying, "Bab shall have a nurse to-morrow, though I doubt if she can be more skilful than you have proved yourself."

Burr had scarcely spoken. He had not known in what capacity Barbara had been there. Not so Jack. A word from Etta gave the clew to his quick perceptions. He fumed inwardly, and waited only to find some suitable place to vent his anger.

They reëntered the carriage.

"I wont go back, Burr. He may drop me at home. Such a piece of heartlessness!"

"I guess it was all accident, Jack."

"Accident! Much you know! Nellie and her mother have insulted the little thing from

the day she entered school in that funny style of dress. She 's a lady born and bred, and they have n't greatness of soul enough to know it. I detest such a spirit."

"I too. I 'd no idea of it. Seems to me I have heard Etta fume about something of the sort, but it passed out of my mind."

"Oh, Burr, my good fellow, your head 's always buried fathoms deep in books, but I 've followed the whole thing. Did you ever hear of the basket of cold food?"

"No. Go ahead."

Jack told the story, and they separated with mutual indignation.

The next morning Mr. Allen got his own breakfast under Barbara's jocose directions. She determined to carry it off as gayly as she could, and help her father to sustain his usual good nature.

Leaving her comfortable, he went to the hospital to see if Maggie could be obtained for the emergency. She was there and returned with him. It was a happy surprise to Barbara. She was petted and made much of to her heart's content; for the first time in her young life she knew the meaning of being "ministered unto."

The day wore on. Before noon a carriage drove up. Mrs. Miller came in with Nellie this time. Her husband had insisted. They were

not prepared to find their little serving-maid disabled, and Nellie, whose better nature had been coming to the surface, gave a little cry of unaffected horror as she saw the bandaged hands. She sprang towards her, took the delicate face in both hands, and kissed it tenderly. Her eyes were full, her heart was uncovered.

"Barbara dear, can you ever forgive me?"

"Don't, Nellie. It has made me so glad to be able to do something for you."

"But oh the shame for me! You will forgive me? We may be friends?"

"With all my heart."

"We are shocked, Miss Allen, that you should suffer in doing this for us. We must express our gratitude, and do all we can for you. We can never repay the debt we owe you. But you must be willing to receive compensation for your beautiful work."

"Thank you, Mrs. Miller, I can take nothing. Nellie," she added, "don't offer me money for what I have done for love; accept the love."

"I will, dear. Mother, she shall not be paid; she *cannot* be. She saved my life. She has given me back to you and papa. It shall be just as she says. She shall be my friend, my sister."

The tears standing in Nellie's eyes overflowed.

The two girls understood each other as they had never before. Nellie asserted her right to choose her friend.

At that moment Mr. Allen came in. His face grew stern as he took in the situation. But Nellie gave him no time to form conclusions; she drew near, speaking quickly, looking at him through wet eyes.

"Don't look so stern, Mr. Allen. I am so sorry, so ashamed! Barbara has forgiven me. Will not you?" She looked very winning. He was touched; his eyes smiled.

"My little girl and I will walk abreast in these matters. If she is satisfied, I am."

Mrs. Miller expressed to him her grief and her desire to recompense his daughter most liberally for her assistance, and hoped he would advise her to accept her just dues.

"My daughter is right, madam. Miss Nellie's acceptance of her terms is of far more value than any sum of money could be."

There was nothing more to say. Nellie asked if she could come again, and was assured of a welcome. After that not a day passed that she did not come, loaded with everything that would cheer and encourage the helpless one. She became a great admirer of Maggie, and day after day the girls met together in Barbara's humble rooms, as joyous a band of friends as

could be found in the city. To Nellie it was a new existence. By the time Barbara's hands were well Nellie was so deeply interested in her and her idyllic mode of life that the mother grew alarmed. But Mr. Miller would not have the intimacy interrupted. He still hoped to prevail upon her to accept a worthy gift from him or from Nellie.

No one rejoiced in Nellie's new attitude towards Barbara more than Clare did, although she had no part in the event that finally brought them together. She expressed in every look and tone the pure satisfaction she experienced. It was Clare who went to Mrs. Ellis with the good news, that Jack might get it through his mother's letters; Clare who wrote Dot of the new order of things and of the delightful meetings they were holding in the different homes, the loveliest of all in Barbara's plain but pretty rooms.

Barbara had not seen Jack after his first assistance. He returned the next morning to his work in the neighboring city. The study of law had attracted him. He had settled down to a reasonable amount of diligence, and was looking forward to a year abroad as soon as the course was over.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MAGGIE'S VACATION.

MAGGIE had graduated with her class, received her diploma, and begun her work; she was always among children unless the call otherwhere was loudly imperative. Mothers intuitively recognized her rare capacity, her firm, loving, sympathetic touch, her indescribable power over the sufferer. They trusted her faithfulness, her unswerving rectitude, and honored her independent self-respect. She was in constant demand, and life was a joy to her. She gave herself to it with a fresh delight for every case where the slightest hope of recovery existed. She was buoyant and bright when others doubted, brave when others feared, almost imparting her own vitality towards the recuperative powers of the weaklings that rested in her arms. It was well into February when she received an urgent call from Miss Brainard to hasten to her.

There was no explanation, and yet the family felt that something was held in reserve. They were assured that all were well; Maggie was not needed as nurse. They advised her to wind up

her affairs and start immediately; a little vacation would not harm her.

She thrilled with desire to drop everything and fly to her only friend, to leave behind the pain, sickness, suffering and death, the care and labor that crowded her days, and for a little indulge in entire freedom and unlimited rest. The outlook was alluring; she would drop every task, and without one backward glance obey the call of the only one on earth who had any right to her obedience.

A long talk with Mrs. Hamlin followed: a trip to Stanton Falls with Becky for a day, to rearrange the wardrobe for a different climate and provide a substitute to meet the last call for her services, and her plans were perfected. What could be more satisfactory?

For a few days it was the engrossing theme among Barbara's callers. Etta, Clare, Nellie were all on hand to advise and assist. Barbara was able to resume her homely duties, and all were glad to have the faithful nurse given a holiday.

Dot's last effusion to Clare was received with jest and laughter. Hale performed his most breakneck summersaults in response to Kitty's love and message from her only doll, "Bullet," the name having clung tenaciously from Ned's careless greeting to the much-abused favorite.

Though Barbara's hands were fairly well, they were too tender but for the mildest service, and Nellie's basket of morning supplies which she never failed to bring were very helpful.

She could not throw herself into the household labor as Clare and Etta did, but the help she could bring was lovingly rendered and graciously accepted.

Mr. Allen had sometimes appeared on the scene to find Nellie putting last touches to the dinner-table, in shape of a slender vase of flowers, a tiny dish of salad, or a daintily arranged cluster of fruits, Etta and Clare dishing up the less ornamental viands, and Barbara fluttering happily about, as a mother-bird would overlook her eager brood. Then such tuneful laughter, such gay challenge and repartee, merry good-bys, and scurryings away, that father and daughter might quietly enjoy their mid-day meal!

Nellie declared she had never known such fun. Her father was her confidant. He enjoyed it with her as a grand joke. The mother failed to approve. She satisfied her conscience with the thought that Nellie was doing charitable work, and she was certainly old enough to take no harm from contact with the inferior class. She regretted the necessity, but as Mr. Miller's views were unfortunately more democratic than her own, and he was determined to support Nel-

lie in her strange freak, she must yield the point as gracefully as she could. Strife was wearying. She would let the matter drop; it would right itself.

She had no doubt that Jack Ellis was very friendly to Nellie. It was her unfailing source of comfort. His father was possessed of great wealth. Her ambition had long been to see the double fortunes united in these two only children. She had grace and delicacy enough to conceal her hopes, even from her husband, but in her secret thought a loose rein was given to this supreme desire.

A week had passed. Maggie had nearly completed her arrangements. There was but one thing more to attend to.

"Tell me; can I help?"

"Yes, Aunt Dolly. I want to be taken to the old rag-picker's home. I want to leave her comfortable. I have n't seen her for a long time."

"I will go with you this afternoon. I suppose they still swarm in that gulch on the outskirts west?"

"Oh yes: can we take up Barbara? Clare is busy as ever."

"Certainly, it will do her good. Then—?"

"I shall be ready to say good-by for a little."

This plan was carried out. There had been a fresh fall of snow. The thin spots were recov-

ered, the roads in fine condition, the sky clear, the day brilliant and cold, a sting in the air; the horses carried them swiftly. Barbara was called for, and they were in a few moments at the place where some of these busy fragment-gatherers had crowded together. A narrow footpath had been trodden from the roadway, zigzagging down the hill through dead brush covered fantastically with the clinging snow, to the door of the first rough shed, sudden and sharp turns taking it from one to another of the huddling premises.

Smoke escaped from a rusty funnel protruding from the upper sash of a rude window. There were signs of life about the settlement, and Maggie prepared to investigate.

"Don't stay long, child. It looks like a dubious spot."

"Have no fear. I know her well; she adores me. You had better move about if I go in."

With a spring she was out of the sleigh over the icy rail; partly sliding, partly running, she reached the door. Some one inside had heard the sound of her coming and opened far enough to peer through. In a second it was flung wide, and two scrawny hands were held out for Maggie to grasp. She turned her glowing face back to the road, calling out,

"All right; I'll stay a few minutes," and disappeared.

"Nurse Maggie! Nurse Maggie!" was her greeting.

"I 've come to see if you are comfortable this cold weather. Do you have all you need?"

"Ver' comfor'ble. Have plenty eat, ver' warm."

Maggie hardly saw how it was possible, but concluded their ideas of comfort varied.

"What do you do if you are sick? Who takes care of you?"

"Plenty women; ver' kind."

"I am going away. I shall leave this card and envelope with you. If you need help before I get back, send it to the address. They will care for you; and to-morrow I will send you some things to use; don't sell them. And here is a little money; don't put it away; use it. When I come back I shall come and see you again. I shall never forget that you were kind to me when I was motherless and suffering."

She gave her ten dollars, wishing it had been ten times that. To the woman it was the promise of luxury for the winter.

There was no more time. The halloa of the coachman sounded, and with blessings from the virgin and all saints showered upon her, Maggie said good-by and climbed the slippery hill. On the way home she expressed her desire to send some comforts to the place.

"What does she need?"

"I could better tell what she does not need; warm clothing certainly. She had on odd shoes fairly yawning. Oh if I were rich! If auntie were here!"

"Why, Maggie child, I have a mind to scold you. We will go at once; you shall select everything you want; they shall be sent her to-morrow. Barbara shall help us."

"Yes indeed, I shall be glad. And, Maggie, I'll take your charge for my mission work while you are away."

"And write me of her?"

"As often as you wish."

"Now I'm happy. She's the only living link between this and my babyhood."

"You are a brave girl; how many would be ashamed of it."

"Ashamed of the kindness I stood in such desperate need of? Not I, indeed."

Strong, beautiful womanhood! God has more in reserve for you than you are able to bestow.

The friends South awaited her coming with impatience. The days dragged fearfully in their eagerness to share this new knowledge with her whom it more nearly concerned. Every added delay seemed interminable. The news they held was so weighty. They filled the hours with

welcoming preparations, then with folded hands looked into other waiting eyes and wondered what she would say.

Mr. Hamlin went to New York with her, placed her in the care of the steamer's captain, and waved her a good-by from the pier as she stood among strangers on deck.

Now began her first experience of ocean life; she absorbed every strange effect, every varying phase of sound and action. Nothing escaped her quick, comprehensive glance: the incessant tramp of countless porters, passing back and forth over the gangway burdened with freight—where could they stow such a vast amount of lumbering boxes, barrels, casks, and miscellanea?—the sharp calls, the creaking of ropes, the splash and gurgle of the water, the ringing orders of officers, the last piece of freight, the noise subsiding, the suspense of departure, the swinging off at last and slow start, gathering force and momentum from every throb of the great heart of the ship.

As they steamed out the harbor into the boundless ocean she felt like a bird thrown out of her nest, a freedom as of wings, an exhilaration that inspired her with a desire to conquer every obstacle, to gain a victory over every ill.

She wondered if young men in their first start from home, in eager pursuit of fame and

fortune, felt the glow and determination that came to her in this first breath of ocean air.

The confusion passed; well-wrapped passengers walked briskly back and forth the deck; others, out of sight, were making hasty preparations for any event that might transpire.

Maggie had no desire to go below: her stateroom had received her handbag, extra wrap, and a useless book Clare had chosen for the dull hours. She was assured there was to be no dulness, no time to bury herself in a book. The immensity about her was filled with unknown wealth she longed to explore. Nothing escaped her. Her eyes were everywhere, noting the duties of each officer and subordinate within compass of her vision.

She had a healthful appetite, and when the stewardess sought her to prepare for supper, she followed and was placed beside the captain as his especial charge.

Her bright face, responsive manner, motions of quick grace, won friends immediately. There would be no loneliness for her.

After breakfast the next morning she was on deck again: ocean all about her, the great blue sky overhead far off, the world of blue beneath; the yellow sun pouring its molten gold over everything, touching the cordage, tinting the awning, glinting here and there in patches of

brightness that dazzled and warmed her whole being.

Gulls followed in the ship's wake, dipped to the crests of spray, and darted along in eager pursuit of food. Not a cloud in the heavens.

Before night the air grew milder; they were speeding along grandly. There was no weariness, no monotony; every moment new forms and wonderful, changing colors, a different breath and odor in the air, a new tint in the depth and curve of a wave, a new shape of white foam upon its crest—all surprising, all delightful. Hour by hour she walked, catching in her swaying gait the rhythmic motion of the ship, taking in great draughts of pure ocean air that seemed to impart increased vitality to her already abundant supply. A night spent in Savannah, another in Jacksonville, and then the early start for the distant point where Ned was to meet her. There was not a trace of weariness to be seen; fresh, bright, ardent as ever, to Ned she was a vision of perfect life and abundant health.

Ah how much they had to tell! How they talked! There was so much in common between them, their work so much alike; both enthusiasts, both reaching for the best results, both hopeful and looking for success.

The all-engrossing subject of the last few

weeks in the Southern homes had been forbidden. Ned was to leave that field for Aunt Clarissa and Mrs. Kent to open up.

The entire strangeness of the country interested Maggie; part of it had an unfinished look to her. The groves of ripening fruit among a wealth of dark glossy foliage were most lovely; but the waste space, the vast areas of unoccupied, untilled land, the tracts of tawny sand, the gopher hills, the clumps of yellow, coarse grass growing sparsely here and there, all gave her an unsatisfied feeling, as though the country needed workmen and care-takers.

Even the pine forests looked thin and scant of foliage, the long swaying Spanish moss giving a mournful aspect to the country. She missed the rich verdure of the grass-covered fields and velvety hills of her Northern home, the density of the woods that she was accustomed to. Her nature was too abundant not to regret this apparent dearth; and plodding through the desolate, silent country, where even the cart-track could be discerned but by one familiar with the way, she said regretfully,

"The air is so pure, so exhilarating, and the sky so wonderfully clear; if there were more cultivation, less barrenness, it would be exquisite. Where are your people, your workers?"

"We shall be in the midst soon now. It's

more unsettled here than in other parts of the country. The direct route from the station to our corner happens to lie through the most desolate portion. It makes one feel out of the world. This turn brings us into a more populous part. What's the matter with this?" he asked merrily.

"How rural! How pretty!" she exclaimed, as coming suddenly upon a tiny cot on the outskirts of an extensive pine forest, set down upon the west of a fine young grove in its first bearing. The house was low and long, with vines and creepers running to the eaves, covering it almost entirely, shutting in the veranda like a room and throwing out long tendrils that caught upon the shrubs and trees near, making natural arbors for the children's playhouse.

A broad hallway cut through the midst from front to back opened upon a sandy walk, lined with shrubs of many kinds and leading to the lake some rods away, where lofty magnolias showed to Maggie's delighted eyes their great white blossoms.

On one side the cabin hibiscus and oleanders spread a wealth of bloom, jasmine filled the air with fragrance, and roses bloomed abundantly. Beyond the house the garden, closely picketed, was filled with a growth of vegetation almost rank in its exuberance; great fiery tomatoes,

egg-plant in its dingy purple or glowing black, melons that made one warm and thirsty to look upon, and strawberries ripening large and luscious on the hot sand.

"Look at those berries; they must be enormous."

"Wait a moment," answered Ned; with a bound he was off the cart, over the fence, and up to the house. Two fair-haired little girls had appeared upon the porch. He went in as if on friendly terms, and soon emerged with a young woman, who held a paper bag hastily doubled and twisted together.

"I will pick the berries, Mr. Brainard. You get a bunch of roses for your friend."

She filled the bag with large red, ripe fruit, and with quick and willing feet flew back to the house, giving it to the largest child.

"Here, dear, take it to the lady."

As Ned approached from the front she again appeared, with pitcher and glass, saying to Maggie,

"I thought you must be thirsty. Will you have some lime-water?"

"Are all the people here so kind?"

"We are glad enough to see any one, I assure you."

A few more pleasant words and the travellers went on, leaving as happy thoughts as they took

with them. Another stretch of wilderness, and then—

"This is the doctor's place. Do you like it?"

"Grand! But it looks lonesome among those moss-draped trees. Ah what a dear old lady there on the porch, all gray but her white hair. They see us; they are waving. How friendly!"

Ned swung his hat; Maggie bowed and smiled; it was a cheery welcome.

"They seem glad as our own people. How far is it now? I long to be there."

"Are you tired? Only through the farm; it cuts off quite a piece; and here are my boys ready to open gates."

"Eb'nin', Massa Ned."

"What elegant teeth; the little monkeys. How they grin." Maggie was brimfull of laughter. "One usually upsets my gravity; a dozen is more than a match for my very best intentions. Will it trouble them? Are they sensitive."

"Not a bit; nothing they like better than fun."

There had been a steady improvement. The place had grown under Mr. Brainard's care. The great plantation looked to Maggie like a primitive township. Every cabin in the negro quarters held its small surroundings, in beautiful order. The women, who had received

through Dot and Harry a lofty idea of Maggie's powers, appeared in newly starched prints, white aprons, and brilliant head coverings to welcome her, for did they not have a share in the home-coming of every member of the family?

A round-eyed, open-mouthed girl, black as ebony, brought great bunches of red blossoms saying shyly as she held them towards her,

"Fo' de lady."

A boy tore out from a near grove with a brace of dogs capering about him, a small basket of luscious oranges in his hand, and as he came panting up to the cart he grasped his brimless hat and called,

"Massa Ned! Massa Ned! dese fo' yo' lady."

Maggie could contain herself no longer; she was overwhelmed with the comical side of this Southern picture; a gurgle of irrepressible laughter was all the thanks she could bestow.

With a sly glance at her face he shoved the basket into the wagon and trundled off to open and close the gates as they passed through.

It was but a few rods through the hummock road to the lakeside home; but the shade, the dense undergrowth, the overhanging branches matted with rank vines, made the way for a short distance almost black. On each side of the narrow path was black, impenetrable jungle;

the dampness and gloom depressed Maggie at once; her sensitive organism was already beginning to feel the strain of the day's journey.

Ned noticed it.

"This is the most unpleasant spot to a newcomer. We get used to it, I suppose; but we're going to take hold of it this spring, put the whole force on, and open a better road. In time we hope to clear it all away."

"Is it safe? I should think I was in the jungles of India."

"Oh yes, we're too thickly populated for wild animals, though I often think it would be a splendid covert for them to crouch in."

"Don't speak of it, Ned; it's uncanny."

"That's not like you. You are tired."

"Ah!" she sighed, "there's the sky again, and a lake! How lovely! And—and there's the house—and—auntie! auntie!"

She was there on the porch, in their arms. Greetings, laughter, and happy tears mingled; Maggie was glad to be folded in Aunt Clarissa's warm embrace once more.

There was to be no excitement that night. The traveller was to have the hours for rest. Miss Brainard vetoed all confidences; bright scraps of news were indulged in; a refreshing meal, a short, merry gathering on the veranda

until the early darkness shut down upon them, and weightier matters were deferred until the morning.

The doctor's mother could scarcely control her impatience to meet the young girl who, she was convinced, was her sister's child. Little sleep visited her that night; morning found her pale, restless, and weary.

"Mother, this wont do. You 'll be sick before you have seen her. Suppose Molly and I make an early call and invite Miss Brainard and the young lady to return with us; then let things take their course."

"Yes, do so. Bring her to my room. I want to confront her with the portrait and see for myself."

"I see. Keep up bravely, little mother; I believe in her. She 'll be the comfort of your age yet."

"You are that, my son. No one can take your place in my heart." She rested her hand on his arm and looked into his face with a depth of love that appealed to him strongly.

He stooped and kissed the delicate face, seated her in the easy-chair by the window, and went in search of his wife.

Mrs. Kent watched them as they went to the landing, unmoored the boat, and struck off into the lake; they were soon lost round the bend. A sense of relief came to her, her tired head

rested against the chair; when the maid came with the lunch her son had ordered she was sleeping.

It was a face of unusual sweetness and purity of expression. Grace and patience had done perfect work during the years of a long life. There was not a trace of the bright, defiant, daring spirit shown in the beautiful portrait above her mantel and repeated in the features of the young girl she was awaiting.

Dr. Kent and his wife were impressed with the striking resemblance between the two faces. He found himself studying Maggie's appearance. He remembered his aunt clearly enough to feel that this stranger was startlingly like her. There could be no doubt of the relationship between them. She was his cousin. He must not prolong his mother's impatience. A glance at his wife reminded her. Miss Clarissa accepted the invitation for both. Maggie would have delayed. She had not been with these nearer friends long enough to be willing to leave them so soon; but she made herself ready.

The morning was perfect, thin, misty clouds allowing the sun to sift through in softened light. The boat ride was charming. The doctor's strength propelled them quickly. The calls of Dot and Harry followed them:

"We shall come for you soon as lunch is over."

Maggie nodded. It was not in Aunt Clarissa's style to rush round in this way, but it might be Southern hospitality. They were going out of sight; a moment more the curve had been rounded and through the trees Maggie saw the same gentle face, with its crown of silvery hair, that she had noticed the previous day upon the porch.

A colored boy secured the boat. The party walked towards the house together. The shade-hats were left upon the hall rack. Mrs. Kent led the way up the broad, easy staircase.

"We must go to mother's room. She is wishing to see you, Miss Maggie."

As they entered she rose, came forward eagerly, without a word or glance for any but the stranger, took both her hands, saying,

"My child! Margaret's child!"

The greeting was very strange. Maggie had become accustomed to the peculiarities of the sick and aged. She smiled a quick response, murmured a low reply, and glanced from the gentle face of one whom she suspected of falling into the childish ways of age towards the others; they were all regarding her. Was anything the matter? Aunt Clarissa had a peculiar expression about her eyes.

As Maggie turned to take the seat the doctor

proffered near his mother's chair, her gaze fell upon the portrait over the fireplace. The open window threw a broad light upon the picture. She started, her eyes dilated; she drew her hand from the clinging clasp of the old lady and with a single rapid motion stood before it, devouring it with startled gaze.

Silently they watched her. Her cheek flushed and paled, her lips trembled, her hands clung tight together; she turned upon Aunt Clarissa such a pained, expectant, pleading look, and asked,

"Who is it, auntie? Is it—my mother?"

"She recognizes it," whispered the doctor's wife.

"Oh, auntie, tell me!" The rich color had left her face; she had a frightened, doubtful appearance; even the doctor turned away to hide the emotion he was not willing to expose.

Mrs. Kent was more self-possessed now than the others. She folded her arms about Maggie, replying,

"It *is* your mother, child. We are sure. There can be no doubt. You are mine now, my sister's child."

"Your niece. But why—but why?" She could not ask why they had left her all these years to the care of strangers. A flood of memories overwhelmed her, tears rolled down her

face. She turned again to Miss Brainard as to an only, faithful friend,

"Did *you* know, auntie?"

"No one could know until now, child. You shall have the whole story. I must share your love with this new-found relative."

They drew together. Again all the facts were rehearsed. Uncertainty, perplexity, and doubts disappeared. Maggie accepted the position given her in the family gratefully, with a serious, uncertain joy, mixed with fear that it might be as quickly snatched as it had been bestowed upon her.

The gentle old lady could not withdraw her gaze from the young girl's face. She held her hand, brushed the hair back from the broad, low brow, smiling gravely as with an inward sweetness of spirit, a restfulness that had come unexpectedly. Questions and replies followed till explanations drew to a close. Maggie went again and stood before the picture straight as one of their pines, tall, supple, with an easy elegance of motion that Mrs. Kent recalled at once.

"Do you remember?" she asked her son.

He nodded. He could never forget the bright, vivacious woman with whom he had frolicked and who responded to his boyish call for "Aunt Mag." Everything about the newcomer proved her origin. He saw the satisfac-

tion overspreading his mother's face as she watched every movement of the girl and divined every emotion of her expressive features. The hour of parting came all too soon.

"I 'm not willing to let you go, my child." Her voice lingered tenderly about the last words.

"I shall come back. It seems so strange—and—beautiful to have a relative—a real aunt. I shall love you—so much; but this one none the less. She has done everything for me."

A rich flush overspread Miss Brainard's face as Maggie turned towards her.

"She has indeed. We can never repay her. She is willing to share your affection, dear. And we have been so long bereft, I fear we shall be selfish."

"I 'm not worth half so much, but it 's all very precious to me."

At that moment Dot's rosy face appeared.

"Have you had enough of Maggie, mother Kent? We want her now."

There was no alternative. The doctor decided in favor of the young people.

There was a promise of daily meetings, bright good-bys, and they recrossed the lake.

Maggie's face was radiant; she was no longer nameless.

CHAPTER XIX.

"FATHER DEAREST!"

BARBARA'S life was more lonely after Maggie left her; and her friends vied with each other to make good the absence. Nellie could not do enough for her comfort. It was as though fetters had been removed from her and an unaccustomed freedom bestowed; as though having been blind, she saw with a clearer vision, and found in pure unselfishness a new experience. Clare was astonished at the sudden change; her face expressed the satisfaction of a pure unworldly spirit. Etta had no hesitation in saying,

"Well, Nell, it takes flood or fire to win you; to all appearance it 's worth the risk. Why you never saw before as far as the rest of us, I can't understand."

"Only wickedness, Etta. None but you would have the face to make me confess it. Don't speak of it again. Bab and I are sisters now, are n't we, midget?"

A sound of laughter was the only reply needed.

"Do the hands feel all right?" asked Etta.

"Yes, nearly. I can use them with care."

"Poor hands!" Nellie flushed as she took them. "When will the marks ever go? I wish it had been my own, Barbara. Your pretty hands!"

"No indeed, Nellie. If they had not been burned, you might have never given me your love; it's worth more than my hands to me."

A look of real affection passed between them.

"I dread to have you go, girls. I wish one of you could stay. I do miss Maggie. I did n't think it would make such a difference, but perhaps I shall soon begin to paint."

"Then you wont want us bothering you. Hale! Where's that boy? Hale, where are you?"

"Here, Etta, under the steps."

"Come out. You have left the door open, mischief. What are you doing?"

"I'm making snowballs to fire at that old woman when she gets here; this is my fort. I'll let her have one now."

"Hale! Hale!" called Barbara. "Come to me quickly. What a vindictive little fellow you are. You must be kind to her. She is not bad; she found you. Maggie cares for her and would be angry if you should snowball her."

"Well, I wont then."

Barbara went back from the door with a merry look in her eyes and resumed prepara-

tions for her father. At last everything was ready, the table invitingly spread, his chair in place, the dinner hot and waiting for his coming. The hands of the clock pointed to the hour. Why did he not come? Another five minutes—ten—the dinner would not be so palatable. A half-hour passed; perhaps he was not coming until night. Something unusual had prevented. The gray eyes took on a slightly troubled look; she went to the window. Ah! a step on the walk. She hastened to open the door.

It was a stranger.

"Your father has fallen, and is somewhat hurt. Don't fear." Her very lips were white; he thought she would fall.

"They are bringing him here." Still no reply; she was holding to the door; it had begun to sway back and forth with her weight. The stranger stepped in, caught her, aided her into the front room, and placed her upon the lounge; then looking about for a glass of water he brought it to her, saying,

"You must n't break down! Be brave! He will be here soon. They are on the way. The bed must be ready. Where is it? Can I help you? You are faint; eat a bit; there 's time."

She shook her head. Eat! and he, the only one in life for whom it was worth her while

to live, hurt, perhaps dying. Surely a merciful God would not take all from her, would not leave her quite alone in this world, such a wilderness without him. And he was so large and strong, so full of love and kindness!

"Tell me," she articulated faintly.

"He stumbled as he turned to the edge of the scaffolding, reached for the support, failed to catch it, and was over. There was nothing to break the fall."

"Dear God!" A shudder went over her, she trembled like an aspen leaf. She wrung her hands together, moaned, and tried to rise.

"You must brace up, miss. Show me his room. I can help you." He saw he must act for her.

"Yes; are they coming?"

She staggered towards the bedroom and opened the door. A rush of cool air came from it. It seemed to revive her. At once the realization of what depended upon her flashed across her mind. She could take care of him, work day and night for him, bear any weariness or privation, if God would give her the dear life.

They were coming. She heard the careful tramp of feet and saw the dear, still form borne upon the stretcher and laid on the bed. Almost immediately a physician's carriage stopped and help was at hand.

The doctor ordered the room to be cleared. All went but the stranger, who proved to be foreman of the builders. He remained to assist.

"You had better leave us," he said to Barbara.

She pressed her hands tightly and shook her head. It seemed as if the power of speech had left her. He whispered to the doctor that she was the daughter. A glance followed quickly from the physician and at once he said,

"He may be only stunned. You go and prepare bandages in the other room. I will speak when I am ready for you."

It was a command—merciful, for it gave her something to do. Only stunned! Not dead! Would he come out of this unconscious state and speak to her again? Plenty of linen, bandages, lint, everything that might be needed. Only stunned! What blessed words!

But the doctor knew, of course. He was only stunned. She had torn up yards of old soft linen; everything was done; why was she not called? She must know. The doctor ought not to keep her from him. She could not bear it; she must go in. Her hand was on the latch. The door opened and the doctor took her hands in his. He could hardly bear the pleading, agonized look of the pallid face.

"Have you no one with you?"

"Is he better? Do tell me. I can bear it if I know."

"Poor child, you must know; but you can't be here alone."

"He wont die. You said he was only stunned." She had to pull her hands from his clasp. "Let me go to him. I know I can wake him. Oh be kind!"

"I will, my child. It is a critical case. I must consult others. You must have a nurse at once and help. Where are your friends? If you want to help me you must be brave."

"Yes, I do, I will. I can do a great deal. Now let me go to him. I will waken him."

She went on tiptoe into the room. They had cut off his clothing, and he lay there white as the garment that covered him, not a mark in sight to show where death had struck and tried to enter.

Tears were in the foreman's eyes as he watched the slight form and heard her low, strained tone, "Father! father dearest! Can't you wake, father? It's Barbara, your little Bab."

She paused, looking upon him as though her gaze would effect what the voice failed to do; then turning to the two who watched her, she said, "He doesn't hear!" It was the terrified cry of a child.

"You must tell us who will come to you. Nothing more can be done now. Whom shall this man go for?"

Clare. Yes, Clare was her first thought. Mrs. Hamlin would know what she had better do.

He took the address and went at once. The doctor told her he would send a nurse immediately and return soon with help to examine more thoroughly into the case. "And remember," he added, "while there is life there's hope. You must keep up your courage. You must eat or take a cup of tea or coffee. Will you do it at once?"

"I'll do anything you say. Now go and get more doctors. You will save him. I'm not afraid now."

He insisted upon her eating before he left. He had noticed the table, saw she had not dined, and knew she would not eat if left alone.

Her father had received terrible injuries, how serious could not be determined at once. He was not conscious. There was no apparent suffering. He lay motionless as one dead. It seemed hours that she crouched on the floor by his bed watching his face; in reality it was less than three-quarters of an hour when Mrs. Hamlin drove up with Becky.

They found her there, with such a helpless anguish in her eyes that sudden tears filled their

own. Mrs. Hamlin raised her, pressed her in her arms, took her to the other room, and let her sob and cry unchecked.

Then she told her Becky had come to stay, to care for her and the house. A nurse would come for her father. All she had to do was to hope and pray. God was her Father. All would be well.

"Are you sure?" in her pathetic, clinging way.

"Quite sure. It *must* be best. It is his will. I shall stay until the doctors and nurse come. Becky will not leave you. I shall go in the other room; you stay and show Becky where to place things. We are all going to do the best we can. You shall not be alone."

What help there is in friendship! What courage and hope it can impart!

Through Clare Mr. Miller heard the news. It was *his* time. He had not thought it would be so calamitous. But he could come forward now. Nothing should be lacking. He went at once to the house. He had a bright nature and a warm heart. He insisted upon placing a large sum of money at her disposal.

"My dear, there's not a word to say. You call Nellie your sister. Look upon me as a father until your own is restored. God help you and him!"

There was a numb feeling at her heart. She

had no tears. Her eyes looked to him like great fountains of grief and terror.

"I shall come this evening. Be strong, Barbara. He needs you now. You must not fail him."

"I shall not."

He understood that the shock had almost deprived her of the power of resistance. A great pity filled him. He shuddered as he recalled that but for her his Nellie might not now be his. He realized the horror of her fear. Through it all ran a thread of brightness that he could now pay the debt, in part at least.

She stood as he left her, the money in her hand. As Mrs. Hamlin came towards her she offered it.

"Take it, please."

"Poor child, you want no trouble added to this that is crushing you. Becky, put this money away. Use it as you need; spare nothing. Do everything as though it were your own."

"Dear lamb, I will."

Later the doctors came. They were shut in the sick-room a long time. The consultation passed; there was no hope. The injuries must prove fatal. It was a question if he would recover consciousness. There was little to be done but to wait. Mrs. Hamlin remained until late, then left all in Becky's care.

A good nurse from the hospital was to Barbara a strong staff upon which she might lean all her weight. The strain of the night was exhausting. Sleep was impossible. How often she crept to his bedside, hoping for a change, and back to press her face in the lounge cushions, to stifle the cry that rose to her lips. Would he ever waken, ever look again into her face, call her his little Bab?

And he was all the relative she had. Life held no other for her. She went back to her mother's death—the long preparation, the daily communings, the hours of loving talk, the passing away so peacefully and gently that she had not felt it to be death, had scarcely known at first the bitterness of separation. But this! There could be no suffering to equal it.

Morning brought no change. His breathing was hardly perceptible, the pulse was feeble and fluctuating. The doctor had not a look of hope for her. She had wandered aimlessly from room to room until he came. She fixed her eyes on his face. No hope! She saw it in his averted look, heard it in the words, "Nothing to be done."

Yes, she knew now that the dear life was ebbing away. She would have him but a little longer. She must not fail him now. She must not leave him an instant. If his eyes should un-

close they must meet her face. She must be ready and strong. She was grateful that he did not suffer. Over and over she pressed her lips to his hand and whispered, "Father dearest!"

Nellie came for a moment with her father, but only kissed the white, rigid lips and turned away, her face quivering with pity. Miss Gray came in, whispered a word of love, and held her a moment to her heart. Mrs. Hamlin was there for hours, but Barbara sat close by him, her eyes fixed on the dying face. There was a slight tremor of the eyelids, but they did not lift, a quiver of the lips. She whispered again, "Father dearest!" Surely he answered, the lips moved. "Little Bab!" he said. It was all. Life went out in the effort to breathe her name.

Now indeed she was alone; no one now to "minister unto," no one to love. She was overwhelmed; the billows were going over her. There was no fear of harming him now by her pain or her love. "Father!" she called and clung to him, kissing the dear face over and over until Mrs. Hamlin mercifully drew her away.

None could have been more tender in gentle administrations of sympathy than Mrs. Hamlin. Barbara clung to her as child to mother.

After the few dreadful days that followed she took her by loving force to her own home,

where Clare's quiet thoughtfulness could help to soothe and heal.

For weeks she could not rally. The blow had been sudden and sharp. She seemed to be enveloped in clouds of darkness, in fears that failed to scatter, in doubt and dread they could not understand. Her gratitude was very touching; her effort to subdue her grief in their presence more trying to them than her tears.

Nellie and Etta came to her almost daily. Mrs. St. John's generous nature contributed large store of consolation. Uncle Eric and Mr. Hamlin had many a kind word and thought, and Clare was seldom absent. A long letter, weighted with sympathy, came from Jack to Clare; but there was no light or hope in anything for the mourner. The thought of living alone terrified her.

It was finally the old Scotch woman who guided her wavering steps and spoke helpful words of trust and led her again into the pure light of God's love. Becky had never left her, had been with her through all the untold anguish, had waited upon and watched and tended until she seemed to belong to this sad phase of her life as no other did. And as the woman sat in the sewing-room finishing garments Mrs. Hamlin had thought best to select for Barbara, she had in silence prayed that the stroke might

not be too heavy for her, that God, who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, might bring again hope and courage to this child of his love. Barbara sat near, watching the sunset gold as it streamed in and covered her with its glory.

"It is like God's love, lassie, which can make the saddest days of life glorious to our faith, just as yon sun brightens and softens this dark fabric. He will brighten your life, dear lamb. He is your Father. He is with you always. He loves you greatly, child."

With a little cry she dropped her head in Becky's lap.

"I know it; oh I know it! But oh, Becky, let me cry."

"Cry all you can, my tired lassie. The dear Christ shed tears for griefs like this. Ease your heart, dearie, and think of his love; 't is more tender now than you can know here. He never forbids tears; but he has a work still for his child to do."

"Work! My work is done, Becky."

"Ah no, work is never done. Is my work done because all have passed on that I worked for when I was a young thing like you? Have I not Miss Clarissa left, and Maggie and you, poor lamb?"

"Oh, Becky, what is there for me now?"

"It will come when you are ready. You will

gain no strength to work for Him if you grieve always. You must take up your tasks; they will come. Determine to do the first He puts into your hands; He will give strength. Did you not promise to do something for Maggie?"

"Oh I did. I must; I had forgotten."

"That is one little task. There will be others, and you will find a purer joy in His service than ever."

"I will do it, Becky. But I will stay with you until I go—back."

Her head dropped again. She could not recall without tears and weakness the few homely rooms, the life there put out, the great fountain of love closed for ever. Such reverent love she had for him, so pure and sweet was her affection! His lightest pleasure had been the fulfilment of her day's content, the humblest service for him her perpetual delight.

Could she concentrate this great love of earth into a purer, holier worship, and give her life humbly, perhaps happily, to His service who had stricken her? There was nothing else to hope for, and with this desire feebly burning in her heart she spoke to Mrs. Hamlin of returning to her home and work.

"You do not think of going back there to live alone, Barbara! Why it would be wild. I cannot listen to it."

Clare's hand crept into hers as she emphasized her mother's words.

"No, you are too young to live alone. You must be content with us for the present, dear."

"What shall I do? I can't be a burden to you longer. I must begin work of some kind. As long as I kept house, the little beside that came to me filled up the time; but there 's nothing now. What had I better do, Mrs. Hamlin?"

"Stay with us until Dot gets home, at least. Then we will take Aunt Clarissa into council; she will help us plan. It shall be something that you will like to do. But now you must grow strong and be one of my daily comforts."

A deprecating smile quivered for a moment over the delicate face; poor comfort she considered herself.

"Now that you have spoken to me, Barbara, I do advise you to let Becky and a maid go over and pack the things you value, for storage; you don't want to continue the rent."

"Is it best? Shall I never go back?"

"I don't think you will. The month will soon be up; you had best give up the rooms. Go this afternoon and to-morrow. Shall it be so?"

"Just as you say. I must see Maggie's ragpicker, too."

They were glad to rouse her a little. The work proved beneficial.

The winter crept along very quietly for the two girls. Clare would not leave her friend for any gayety that offered. She was secretly glad that her mother did not press her to accompany her in fulfilling her various social engagements. Their evenings were spent together in Clare's own room, or with Uncle Eric, if he had just the book to read aloud. Short walks, daily rides, helpfulness here and there, consumed the hours and made the winter pass quickly.

Mrs. Ellis had sent for Barbara, and she had passed more than one pleasant afternoon with the invalid. It was quiet and restful, and she could be of service. Mrs. St. John petted her, bought her studies, encouraged her to make more. She sometimes stopped a moment at Nellie's; but the mother was too condescending to give Barbara a feeling of freedom. Yet she censured herself more than she did Mrs. Miller, fearing that she was morbidly sensitive. Without any attempt at sympathy Mrs. Miller's manner must jar upon so delicate an organization as Barbara's.

The hours that Clare devoted to study she spent with Becky, assisting in the household sewing, and as the weeks went on many a lesson of faith was learned from this humble source. With the help of Becky's larger experience and fuller faith she came slowly back into the con-

scious presence of the Master who had not left her alone in this great trial, though her eyes had been so dim that she could not see Him in His loving pity and divine tenderness. She awoke at last to a more real knowledge of His love and to the meaning of those words so precious to a wounded heart: "Abide in me and I in you," "If ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in me," "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full." She had found in her youth what so many search long for, that Christ can change the bitterest grief into a source of purest joy if we heed his words and become fruit-bearing branches of the true Vine, abiding always in his love.

CHAPTER XX.

CLARE'S SUCCESS.

ALL this time Clare was pressing on in work that was becoming more and more a part of her life. One science after another the brave young student had taken up under the guidance of her devoted teacher, going step by step into its secret places, lovingly and reverently garnering one truth after another, until her mind teemed with thoughts too many to express. She longed for intellectual companionship, and in her occasional exits into society she was delighted to find there were pleasures connected with it apart from those springing from accomplishments she was ignorant of. She found that some who helped to make the gay crowd at the house of of this or that friend were better satisfied with the interchange of thought and ideas than with compliments and flattery. A few friends of rare worth she had met among these apparent pleasure-seekers, and one after another they sought her remote corner, drawn by the subtle attractions of her mind, as steel to the magnet, and discovering in her presence a new charm amid these surroundings. More than one car-

ried away the vision of a slender girl with a face through which a soul shone as a light in a transparency, in whose speech were mingled shyness and enthusiasm, modest reserve and truthful frankness. All this time Uncle Eric, who knew her capabilities, urged her on with ardent encouragement.

Mrs. Hamlin's mother-love instinctively presaged increasing separation. There was a vague fear, perhaps, of losing her child upon these boundless fields so unknown to her. She could not object to a certain amount of knowledge; she would like Dot to be a trifle more inclined in that direction; but Clare, she thought, was carrying it to a ridiculous extent, making a perfect recluse of herself. The black veil of a nunnery could not separate her more effectually from the world than that little den beside Eric's study. She might be talented; people called her so; but this shining for a few mere book-worms was a decided failure. Any amount of coaxing failed to win her from her books. It was discouraging to Mrs. Hamlin. The father looked down upon his wife and up to his beloved Clare, for the good man evidently stood as peacemaker between them, and said,

"Let her alone. She has found her true life; we must not interfere."

But one morning there came a tap on Clare's

door, and, "May I come in, dear?" caused her to hustle away a little package of books, bright and new with morocco and delicate lines of gilt.

"Yes, mamma, come right in," she answered, blushing slightly as she spread the folds of her dress over the package at her feet.

"I wont disturb you but a moment, dear, but I want you to please me in this."

"Well, mamma, what is it?"

"We have, you know, invitations for Thursday; and I want you to go, and prevail upon your uncle to go with us."

"Mamma, it will be a trial to him."

"I can't help it. It is my birthday; and were it not for our little Barbara I should have indulged in festivities here. But for her sake we will be quiet this winter. This is to be a delightful gathering or I would n't urge it. But you 'll win your uncle, and make me happy on my birthday?"

"I 'll try to make you happy, mamma; but I can't promise for uncle, you know."

"Well, do the best you can. I knew you 'd please me, dear. I 've ordered a lovely dress for you, and you will have your hair arranged in style, I know."

"Oh, mamma, it wont be like me at all. You know I never could educate my fingers and feet; and my hair is quite as stubborn. It wont

stay in place. It will annoy me, and I shall be thinking of it; let the hair go, mamma."

"I wish you *would* think more of it; it 's lovely hair, so much of it; and those tight braids hide all the beauty. You 'll please me, dear?" she urged.

"Why, if you put it that way, mamma, *le grand artiste* may spoil it for once; but I shall be a week getting it out of snarl."

"Oh no; thank you, dear. Go on with your work; you sha' n't be disturbed about the dress at all; that shall be perfect."

Clare looked anxious but said nothing. After all, dress was of little account, and taking up the package she began again to look it over.

One for her mother's birthday, one for Uncle Eric. Dot must have one, other friends must be remembered. They looked so fresh and new, she smiled as her hands caressed them, looking at the dedication and the initials—her own—with a face beaming as a satisfied child. Then putting all but one away, she went into her uncle's room to the table at which he wrote and placed it before him.

"They 've come, Uncle Eric."

"So they have. Well, well, good style, handy size, fair print. Yes, I like it. Now, Clare, send your modest scruples to the winds and push out boldly. You are master of the

subject, you can make the lessons as alluring as a fairy story, and you are supplying a need felt in every family—botany made fascinating for children. Clare, I 'm satisfied with the first attempt; I think you are."

"Yes, uncle, and you will accept the first I give away, for you have taught me all I know. Dear Uncle Eric, I can never thank you enough for these years of patient toil."

"Years of pleasure to me, Clare; and had they not been, this would more than repay."

"But you wont give me up, uncle; I am still your pupil?"

"Yes, we 've both to dig deeper yet, only make a clean sweep as we go. You 've been a surprise to Dot. She thinks you have lost the joy of living. How is it, Clare? Do you feel that my advice has lost you anything?"

"If I have lost it was to gain more, a permanent joy instead of one fleeting. Uncle, when you took me from emptiness itself, you gave me enough to fill up with, enough to make my barren life fertile."

"True, true, Clare. We 'll stand by each other to the end. Dedicated to the mother; that will please her."

"I thought so. It was not quite suitable, perhaps, a child's book; but the first, you know. And it was good and wise in mother to let me

give up that hateful dancing. I believe disgust of that sent me with a stronger bound towards real hard study."

Thursday evening Clare, with some repugnance, put herself into the costume her mother had prepared for her, and as she joined her mother she was met with a proud smile.

"Clare, you look lovely. I am very proud of my daughter to-night, and of the modest little volume I found on my dressing-table;" tears came in Mrs. Hamlin's eyes. "It was a great surprise. I thank you, darling, for the dedication; it is my best birthday gift. Eric was right; I came near making life a wreck for you."

Letters from the South revealed the mystery of Maggie's imperative call. They learned of the strangely found relatives, the felicity of both parties, the satisfaction and pride of mother Kent, and the happy adaptability of Maggie to her new surroundings—all recalling to the old lady the experience of years far back when she held a mother's place towards her young sister, loved, watched, and guided her until the day she gave her to Maggie's father; the year of delightful companionship afterwards, the illness of the young husband, the counsel of his physician to seek a milder climate, the grief of the parting, the anxiety of the year that followed,

the death of the father, the letters of the grief-stricken wife, the horror of the last tidings—the storm, the wreck, the loss. She could only listen, tears rolling over her soft, wrinkled cheeks, as Maggie, dropping her head upon her aunt's knees, described the dreadful dreams that haunted her early years, rehearsed the scenes of her pitiable childhood, and the part Clare and Dot had in its brightness since. "God *has* been good to me; he has given me the best of all good things, friends."

Every pleasant item of their daily life went to the Northern friends. Maggie wrote weekly to Barbara, Miss Brainard to her sister. She said they would not hasten back. The Kents were to remain through the year. They begged her to lengthen her visit or to leave Maggie with them. Aunt Clarissa preferred to stay a few weeks longer. The climate was wonderful; it suited her entirely. What Florida would be without the climate she failed to conceive. She felt herself growing stronger, more vigorous—as though there could be a necessity — more youthful. It was everlasting summer. She might never be there again. She always fancied large doses of what pleased her.

The young people were daily revelling in new delights now, a picnic under the great oaks by the lake or a steam ride to some romantic

spot upon the gulf coast; just now they were planning a few days at Winter Park, and had engaged rooms at the "Seminole." The Kents were to join them and insisted upon taking Maggie and Dot as their guests. It had been first thought of as a change for Lucy, finally to enter Harry at Rollin's College. His desultory, hap-hazard mode of study was having a bad influence; he was old enough to go safely from home, though he was the same mother-boy as ever, but, boylike, ready for any change.

She sent tender messages to Barbara, adding, "Keep the child with you till I come, Dolly. Maggie is broken-hearted about her. She tells me the love between the father and child was beautiful to look upon, and to think of her as alone in the world would move any heart to compassion. I am thankful Becky could comfort her. Becky is a treasure; tell her so from me. And you know my home is big enough and will be empty enough—as I foresee that between mother Kent and our quiet nephew Ned my chance of companionship will be small. Perhaps I 've had my share. She has been a joy to me. I always thought her nice-looking, but down here she is fairly beautiful. There 's no gift from God to mortals like that of a friend; every real friendship brings with it the remembrance of the first time in my life I fully appre-

ciated God's gift of his Son to us — the one Friend above all others. Every lesser love springs from that and gives increased glory to life. Maggie develops a more spiritual grace under the brightness of this new relationship. A tender glow of love shines from her eyes upon the gentle old lady that is quite a new feature in the appearance of our energetic young nurse.

"We can hardly tell just when you will see us. Attribute all delays to the fascination this free life has for me. One could live here in a tent but for the occasional rains; we have had some severe ones; by-and-by they will come daily with a kind of mad energy that one must experience to understand. But we like it and wish you all were here. I think of putting up a winter cottage after the land is a little more cleared up. Then we 'll have room for everybody. Brother says we cannot leave until it 's too hot to stay longer; now we have a blaze on the hearth morning and evening. Nights are cool."

The spring passed and there was no word of returning. Friends thought they would surely come in May. The month closed and the ideal life still went on, too delightful to break up. Harry had begun his student life at Winter Park. Maggie was domiciled at the Kents,

though there was slight separation between the families at this time. June opened—they still lingered. There had been a rumor at the North of yellow fever at Tampa, and the friends were troubled. Aunt Clarissa replied to their entreaties that Tampa was seldom quite free from fever, but they had not the slightest fear; they were so far from the line of travel there was no danger; that they expected to leave there by the middle of the month, and she had delayed for the sake of having her brother's company as far as St. Augustine, where she intended to spend a few days for Maggie's sake.

It was useless to attempt to contest Aunt Clarissa. She was a host in herself. Her plans were formed with deliberation. They were right; no one must interfere.

Barbara had fallen into a pensive, quiet state, more hopeful under Becky's kindly guidance, filling the hours with helpful work intermingled with seasons of painting that for the time helped her to forget grief.

Jack came on to be with his mother a while; the June days beckoned him; he feared no one would remember his mother's love of roses, and he could furnish her a fresh supply daily. These unexpected, short visits from her jovial boy gave the mother a new lease of life. She brightened visibly, allowing herself to be car-

ried to the carriage for a half-hour ride in the sunshine that flooded everything. She wished him to see Miss Gray soon. She had sent her a note one day, through Mr. Hamlin, but there had been no reply yet. "I missed you sadly that day, my boy. I knew you would discover it if I wrote to you in that mood; my thoughts reverted to your friend; it seemed natural to write a few words to her. I would like to see her."

She attributed to the young teacher a strange power over those she taught, bringing about a higher moral development in them almost from the mere contact with her stronger characteristics, her silent power. She did not see how great a factor in her son's case was her own unvarying patience and trust: that although Miss Gray appealed to his better nature, she held before him the beautiful picture of his waiting, hoping, loving mother.

There was no doubt now. He was doing well—full of ambition, looking to a life of action, happy in it, and making her days bright with his frequent visits and confidences. He must crowd the few days full of pleasure. The young people must be together; he must brighten Barbara's heavy heart. Thus she planned rides and walks for them, sails on the river and excursions on the mountain. With so many engage-

ments Jack delayed his call upon Miss Gray from time to time.

Mr. Hamlin had given her the note from Mrs. Ellis, the reading of which brought to her beautiful face an expression of hope.

"Mrs. Ellis would like to meet you, Miss Gray. She is not able to go out, and she bade me say she would be glad to see you at her home."

"I would like to know Jack's mother; but—but my duties forbid such pleasures. Will you give her my regrets?" she asked in a hesitating manner that awakened anew his sympathy. He could not but see that her life was a sad one, and the sympathy of his manly heart was roused. He knew that heavy burdens of some sort were bruising her youth and crushing her heart; that early years had not prepared her for the life she was now trying so bravely to meet. He longed to transfer the burden from her frail shoulders to his own and bear it all for her; but he dared not speak to tell her all he felt.

It was not long after this interview that her place in school was one day vacant. Mr. Hamlin was perplexed; no word of excuse had reached him. He grew more and more uneasy as the day advanced, and meeting Jack on the street after school-hours, mentioned the fact of her absence.

"I must go there: she needs me," was his quick reply, turning away.

"Stay, Jack. What do you fear? Shall I go with you?"

And Jack, who never thought but that any friend would be welcome if it was as he feared, led the way to the far-off tenement where the guiding spirit of his life dwelt. The master felt irresistibly drawn to follow. The day's absence had brought the maiden before him as her actual presence had never done. Then rose suddenly and tumultuously into his consciousness hopes and fears that might mar or enrich his life. Yet Miss Gray's modest reserve had given him no encouragement to indulge in the one or the other. Why he should be hastening to her at the first suspicion of her need he could not tell, only that as the boy in his frank, ardent way started on his errand of help or comfort, he had no power to stay behind; he must go even if he risked her displeasure by doing so.

"I hope nothing has happened. I tell you, Mr. Hamlin, she has done more for me than any other living soul. If I 'm ever any more than I am now, I shall owe it to her."

"I know it, Jack; I have watched it. And there are others who feel the power of her moral influence as well as the benefit of her teaching. There is a beautiful simplicity in her life

that grows more lovely as she carries it onward into maturer years."

"You have seen it, then, too?"

"None fail to see it who know her, Jack."

"Here we are," interrupted the young man.

"I will remain here. If she needs me, say so; if not, you need not mention me, Jack."

He walked on slowly, while Jack went up to her apartments. As he knocked, the nurse appeared; her troubled face took on an expression of intense relief as she recognized him.

"Come in, sir," she whispered. "My young lady will be very glad to have you here. She is in great trouble, poor child! Come right in."

The young teacher stood by the high dormer-window of the inner room, looking into the western sky; her hands were clasped upon the casement, and the heavily-fringed lids shaded the dark pathetic eyes, now full of tears. She heard his step, and turning she held out both hands, saying in a voice freighted with grief,

"My friend, you come in my hour of need. I have wanted you to-day so much that I thought you *must* know it. Oh, Jack, you are worth everything to me now!"

"What is it?" he asked, terrified at her paleness.

"My mission is accomplished, my work is done. I 've nothing more to live for."

"Is he dead?" he whispered.

She bowed her head, while tears rained over her white face.

"Do not grieve so, Miss Gray. His suffering is over now and I will be your brother."

"It is not my loss, not that I am alone in the world, but this dreadful hopelessness. As he lived, so he died; and for months I have prayed that he might at last waken to consciousness, to hope. Motherless and a stranger, I still had him left; but all to-day I have been alone—this dreadful solitude cheered by no hope for him. I thought I could not bear it; and now you have come to help me, my friend!"

Jack noted the effect of her struggle with painful sympathy, and with words of comfort encouraged hope and trust; and when the nurse came to him to consult about the funeral, without thinking of the promise so long ago made, he left her, saying, "I will come back with one who knows better than I what to do."

Abruptly leaving, he went over the stairs at his most headlong speed and sought the master, who still paced up and down on the street.

"Come up, Mr. Hamlin. Her brother is dead. I don't know what to do for them."

Perhaps, on the whole, it was the best thing he could have done, for Miss Gray's grief overcame the pride that had led to her reserve with

the professor, and his kindness, his delicate attentions, and the persistency with which he took the whole charge of affairs gave her courage, allayed her fears, and finally proved a source of real comfort and peace to her.

She accepted his services thankfully, and found, as one sad duty pressing upon another was lifted entirely from her, how kind and ready a friend he had become.

"I cannot come back to teach at present," she had said.

"Of course not; take all the time you need. I can find one to take your place. Give yourself no anxiety," he replied.

The next day Jack brought Mrs. Hamlin to her. His thoughtfulness touched her, and she welcomed the stranger with a grave, sweet cordiality that won her heart on the instant.

"You should have allowed me to come before, Miss Gray. It is not best to try to bear everything alone. None may afford to make a joyless life for themselves, my dear."

"I have not made it so; I have only accepted it. It is joyless and barren now."

"But it shall not be so long, my poor child. You must let me show my friendship and do what I can for you."

"Most thankfully, Mrs. Hamlin. I cannot refuse what I so much need—a friend."

It was a quiet funeral; only two carriages took the friends—Miss Gray with her nurse in one, Mrs. Hamlin, Uncle Eric, Jack, and Clare in the other. This last attention was perhaps worth as much to her bruised heart as all the others, and her eyes expressed the gratitude she felt.

A week after this day of bitter memories Miss Gray sat with Mrs. Ellis. Jack had gone to his work. She had promised him to break over her reserve for his sake. Mrs. Ellis had a gentle, motherly voice and a hopeful manner. She was urging her to give up teaching.

"You are worn with care; you need rest. Come to me a while, I am so lonely without Jack. We can help each other."

"I cannot be idle, Mrs. Ellis. My old nurse must still have a home with me, and I love the work. It brings its own rewards. Your friendship is one."

"Thank you, dear; but you might make it less arduous by moving nearer—taking rooms in this vicinity. Why not?"

"I may do so another year, Mrs. Ellis, not yet."

She did not say that all her salary had been used to defray the increased expenses of this last illness and that debts were already staring her in the face, small as yet, to be sure, but ugly-looking and threatening as they stood daily

before her, more to be feared than poverty or hard work, than sickness or death. She must take up the burden again for her own sake and that of her faithful nurse.

She had signified her intention to the master of at once going back to duty, and being urged by him to take another week, had positively refused, the more decidedly when he told her that she needed rest, and that in case of illness her salary was continued the same. If that were so she would begin at once. Miss Gray could not receive that for which she might not give an equivalent; and the following Monday she was promptly at her post, a little paler and less animated, but no less determined.

As the week advanced she felt herself lagging in the work; her classes pressed her closely; the young, shrill, healthy voices seemed to grate over her bare nerves; the eager, ambitious, impulsive natures appeared to be galloping away out of her reach, where she could not direct or guide them. She began to realize that after all she might not be able to keep up with the demands upon her strength, when towards the close of the day Mr. Hamlin came near, saying, "I will take this recitation, Miss Gray; mine are over. My sister has just driven up with the girls and they wish you to ride with them."

A look of gratitude more than repaid him. The simple words, "I *am* tired and you are so kind," were not needed, though he found the echo of them lingering in his heart long after.

Clare found her in the dressing-room and took her to the carriage, where Mrs. Hamlin and Barbara welcomed her. The most comfortable corner was for her, the side where the best views could be seen, and the ride was to be in whichever direction she preferred. An hour in the country and she was refreshed and cheered. They left her at the door, little dreaming how closely her tired heart clung to these few remaining friends.

CHAPTER XXI.

LEFT BEHIND.

THE tenth of June had come and more urgent calls to return had been received from the North. It was time to make preparations. Auntie had hoped by delay to prevail upon the friends to go back with her and help fill the great colonial house at Stanton Falls for the coming summer. Mr. Brainard was not ready for this until he had more nearly accomplished the purpose for which he had made the change.

"In five years you may see me there, not before."

"Well, Lucy wont leave you, or Ned either, and I don't want them to."

The Kents had spent the previous summer at the North; they also would remain at home this year. The doctor had plans of building at a point on the lake farther west for friends who would pass the winters there if they could be accommodated without trouble. The work was then going forward.

They found increased delight in daily intercourse with Maggie. The story of her life took on a charm in her fresh telling that was irresist-

ible. The doctor said he had never wasted so much time over his coffee as since discovering his new cousin. They could not be reconciled to her going from them; but there were other considerations than their own pleasure. Miss Clarissa's claim was to be respected. Maggie was not prepared for a longer stay. She felt the clear call of duty; her work was her mistress. She could well afford to say good-by, hoping to come again next year.

There was hurry and confusion enough the next morning to cover the sadness of parting. Those who suffered most, perhaps, were Mrs. Kent and Ned.

A few days brought bright letters from St. Augustine. Mr. Brainard returned within a week, enthusiastic over the four delightful days they had spent together in the old quaint city. He had started them towards home; they would spend a day in Jacksonville and go through on the cars, with occasional stops on the way for rest and variety. Dot had taken cold and was slightly feverish, but Clarissa thought it would pass off. "We sha n't hear again until they reach home."

"It 's a mistake not pressing right home, now they 've started."

"How so? I think they 're wise to get all they can out of the trip."

"They might get more than they'd like. There's a rumor floating of a case of yellow fever in Jacksonville. It may be false."

"Must be. I should have heard of it. I don't believe it. They wont stay there but a night or two. It's too hot. I wish I had urged them to go on."

"It would have been wiser; there's a chance for infection to be carried there any day."

Meantime the objects of this tender interest were unpacking trunks for a longer stay in the doomed city than any one had anticipated.

Dot's fever increased. The doctor was called in. He pronounced it at first to be a slight bilious attack. But it fastened itself upon her as if to stay; flashes of burning fever alternated with creeping chills and deathly nausea, until the bright, happy girl, who had never known illness before, was prostrated. She could not be moved; there was danger of its assuming a congestive nature. It must be broken up and conquered before it was safe to resume travel.

Miss Brainard sent word home that they had started, were delayed a while at Jacksonville, would be home in a week certainly. Then she stood before the glass, looked severely at her reflection, and addressed herself sharply:

"Clarissa Brainard! Are you equivocating

or holding back the whole truth? Pshaw! It 's only a trifling indisposition. If I should write it out simply from my own fears, I should have the whole family down here. No, that would be a shameful ending to such a winter. We 'll fight this thing. The child will be all right in a day or so. We 'll not stint the quinine: follow the doctor's orders faithfully. I wonder if he is capable of magnifying the affair to secure a patient. What an unworthy thought! I 'm ashamed of myself. Well, I am hedged in, and there 's no help for it." She returned to the sick-room. Maggie had soothed Dot into an uneasy sleep, and the two talked in a low tone over the doleful change in their affairs.

"What do you think, child? When can we leave?"

"If we were North, I should think she would be better very soon; but this heat is so depressing, and the last chill was a severe one. Still I think he means to break it up. I shall stay with her to-night, and you must sleep."

"Well, it 's best to take it turn about, and I have more faith in you than myself in this case. But how terribly unfortunate."

"Perhaps not. We are not accountable, and God cannot make a mistake."

"True. If it comes within his plan that we stay here a week or more, there 's no reason why

I should conceal it from her mother. It strikes me it would be a kind of interference."

"No, auntie, we ought not to do that. We never can know the result of any illness."

"Child, you horrify me. I will write at once, tell them the whole story. You are more accustomed to sickness than I; you don't think it serious?"

"Oh no; only it's your own way to be open."

"So it is; you are right. I will send another letter. I only feared to worry them."

Dot was better the next day, two severe chills had taken her strength; she wanted to lie quietly and doze; towards night she brightened, sat up and gave them a few snatches of song. The following day she was again prostrated; the chill was milder and she rallied more quickly. There was nothing for them but to yield to the necessity, hard as it seemed. For once Miss Brainard was obliged to submit to circumstances with what grace she could command.

Dot suffered bravely, fought back her tears, and concealed her disappointment and homesickness. She felt the child's need of the mother. She wanted to bask in the sunshine of home. She had a feeling that the loss she had sustained could be restored only through the touch of mother-love. Maggie's task was to encourage and cheer. Every day at sunset Mag-

gie went for fruit and flowers, cooling drinks, or anything to refresh and please.

In these walks she had often met a young woman in black who took the same breezy hour for the same purpose. She had noticed her at their table d' hote occasionally, had learned that she was a widow, detained by the protracted illness of an only child. She was not strong, and the danger of overtaxing herself and sinking beneath the burden was imminent. Thus she too had taken the early evening for a change of scene, and frequently the two had met, going or coming.

One day, at the late dinner hour, the stranger took her seat looking very white and weary, scarcely raising her eyes, and eating so little that Maggie wondered why she had made the effort to come down.

"My little widow does n't look happy, auntie."

"So I see. How is the child, I wonder? Would it be a little less heathenish to ask?"

"I 'll speak to her. Would you?"

"Yes, do go; leave a cup of comfort in some shape."

Maggie needed no other impulse; crossing the room, she sat beside her.

"I came to inquire about your little girl. Is she doing well?"

"Thank you. She is no worse: but I am in

trouble. My nurse became ill, and I have been unable to get another. I believe I am getting tired out;" she pushed her plate away. "I must go back; the doctor insisted upon my coming down; he is with her."

"Tell me your number; I will come round."

"How kind! Thirty-six, second floor. Do come."

Maggie went back, told Miss Brainard, and asked if she had better offer her services for the night.

"Why yes, if you wont overdo. I don't want you sick; think we can go in a week, certainly."

"Yes, no doubt. But I 'm of no use to Dot when you are with her; she 's coming along nicely, and I 'm aching to get to work. I 'll slip on a wrapper and stay with her to-night."

A short half-hour and she tapped at No. 36.

"Oh, Miss Doane, how kind! May is sleeping; come in. How good to see a woman's face here!"

"I 've come to stay the night. You are to tell me what to do and then go right to bed; take a through ticket and sleep till morning."

The worn face lit up amazingly.

"Are you able?"

"Yes, and willing. Now go and rest. I understand; I will watch every moment."

It was a large room; her bed was on the far side, while the child's cot stood near the window, where every breath of air could be made available.

The shaded light burned low. She arranged all that was necessary for her night's work while the mother prepared for rest. With a glance towards Maggie she slipped round to the foot of the bed and knelt. So long she remained, thinking herself unseen, that Maggie grew disturbed. The little one still slept, the mother still at prayer; or had she, exhausted, fallen asleep?

Maggie was sure she ought to be in her bed, and quietly approaching found her convulsed with sobs she was vainly trying to suppress.

"Why, why, my dear Mrs. Heath, this will never do. The dear Father knows all you would say to him. You are precious in his sight. You are his own. He cares for his own."

"If my little girl is to die too—"

"Now you are taking to-morrow's burden. It is more than you can bear. Leave it with God, who loves you better than you love the child. She is yours to-day; this peaceful sleep may bring strength; she may be better after it. Now will you lie down and sleep and let me go back to her?"

"How utterly selfish I am; forgive me. It looks brighter."

Maggie led her to the bed, gave her a motherly little pat, and touched the eyelids, saying,

"I forbid you to open them again till day breaks."

"You shall be obeyed."

The night passed, and many nights Maggie found she could be of service, that she was needed. No speck of self defiled her beautiful labor of love.

Dot improved very rapidly now. The day of leaving was fixed. Mr. Hamlin had telegraphed to know if he should meet them at any point.

No indeed. Miss Clarissa was not prepared for such ignoble ending of her long holiday. She would finish it in her own independent style.

Dot's bird-notes began to flow again; inmates of rooms near paused to catch the rich outpour of song she could no longer stifle as the time drew near for the journey home.

"Auntie, would it be possible for you to take all the care of Dot on the way?"

"Possible! Certainly. She is no care now. Why? Do you feel exhausted, sick?"

"No, indeed. But Mrs. Heath was so heart-broken at the thought of my leaving that I promised to stay until the child was able to be moved, if you were willing."

"You did?"

"Yes," answered Maggie, with doubtful assurance.

"Well, I don't blame you; but does that little woman realize what she demands?"

"She doesn't demand it. I'm not sure she'll accept it. I would like to help her; and the child is really improving. It's a wonderful case the doctor says himself."

"The wonder is in the nurse, in my opinion. But, child, you must decide for yourself; I can't; no, I cannot take the responsibility. Mother Kent would never forgive me if she knew it."

"Then I may stay? It looks like duty to me. Am I not being led? The little hands hold me strongly. Auntie, are you willing? I can't stay unless you are."

"I must be. I make a point to have no war with duty. But *you* must decide, child."

"Then, dear Aunt Clarissa, I will stay; it may be but a few weeks, and if I can save the mother from overmuch care I shall be glad."

The spinster took the brave girl in her arms for a single moment.

"My girlie, may He have you in His keeping."

Mrs. Heath accepted the offer, realizing the advantage to herself and their sacrifice. It was on Maggie's part a self-renunciation, made long before, not to be interrupted by untoward cir-

cumstances. No doubt she had her dreams; but she could not make herself the centre of them. They were dreams of service, of ministrations to those who needed her: a sweet, bright word where words could help, a firm, strong hand where weakness was to be upheld, a loving patience for all. If haste were demanded, none could be quicker. If waiting, she was strong to wait.

It was with an air of cheer and courage that she stood on the platform at the station and watched the departure. Miss Clarissa's eyes were filled full of tears; Dot looked but half convinced that it was right to leave her. The sky was overcast, the atmosphere gray and muggy; the night had not refreshed them; the only alleviating thought was that they were homeward bound. To leave that bright, strong, hopeful face behind in the gray gloom was enough to move a heart of stone, Miss Brainard said to herself, as she took the last look upon the brave figure in her white dress, like the incarnation of Christian love—a spirit of hope and strength and courage that rebuked her weakening faith.

The excitement of travel roused Dot. Thoughts of home and mother flushed her cheek. She was glad as they advanced; the air became tonic; she freshened visibly; the im-

provement reacted upon Aunt Clarissa's spirits; she feared less for Maggie. They would push right through to Washington, resting a night there. The next night they would be at home.

It was a glad household that welcomed them. Dot went from one encircling embrace to another, and with a long, fluttering sigh of peace rested at last upon her mother's bosom content, like the dove drawn safely within the ark with no more desire to wander. She was satisfied. She had seen all the outside world she needed to.

They looked serious as they learned of Maggie's stay. It was unsafe. There were rumors afloat, vague suspicions in the air, danger to one unacclimated; they wondered that Clarissa allowed it.

"I felt just as you do. It made me weak and sick to leave her there; but what could I do? The child is of age; she 's no fanatic. It was the voice of God to her. I could not rebel against Him. It was hard, was n't it, Dot?"

Becky rested a hand on her mistress' arm and replied,

"Have no fear; you were as brave to leave her as she was to stay. The Lord will protect his own."

"Has my Dot been happy so long from me?" whispered the mother, under the sound of more eager voices.

"Oh very happy, mamma; I've never felt quite away from your heart. I thought I could love you if I didn't see you, until I was sick; then I did want to feel your arms."

"Dear child!" How tightly the arms did clasp her! "You are tired; you must lie down. Clare, bring a pillow, and the afghan, Barbara."

"That's right," interrupted auntie; "don't let her move again until time to eat. Now rest, pet."

There was little rest; each one wanted a word or look. Uncle Eric thought she had grown tall; her father said she was all eyes; Clare and Barbara nestled near her; and Becky placed a tray of tempting lunch close by the lounge. Then Aunt Clarissa's tongue was loosened, and she poured forth a torrent of information that no one cared to interrupt; her audience was eager for every word. There seemed to be no end to the pictures she placed before them.

"I must send off a line to Harry before I stop, but I shall say nothing to them at present of Maggie; I should have both families showering me with reproaches. And once again I insist that I will not be responsible. But I do think she runs a great risk."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FEVER.

Did Maggie's courage fail as the friends steamed out the station and away from her? Did any doubt regarding the wisdom of her decision weaken her purpose in this time of parting? She made no sign. If there was a throb of fear or doubt, none discovered it; if her step faltered as she turned back to the hotel, none knew it but herself and the Master to whose service she had given herself. She bought fruit and a few bright blossoms on the way, and was very soon beaming upon her little charge with a tender smile.

"Have I been utterly heartless to allow this sacrifice, Miss Doane?"

"No indeed; this is my chosen work; what matter where I do it? And how I should feel had I left you here alone with the little girlie! She is certainly improving. Don't you think she looks better?"

"I dare hope it. She would have died but for you."

"I don't know that. Now we must devote ourselves to her; work must be reduced to a

system. She is our one object; we will take turns in everything; you must go out daily, eat and sleep regularly."

The watching and labor were to be divided, that both might retain strength for whatever might come up. As soon as the child could be safely moved, Mrs. Heath intended going to her mother in Vermont.

"If my girlie lives to get there, the air of home will do the rest. Oh for the strength of the hills! This level country has depressed me from the first. And you, Miss Doane?"

"I don't know the meaning of the word from experience. I think I 'm too stolid to be easily moved. Is the doctor coming again?"

"He was here while you were out, says everything is going finely. He congratulated me upon having so rare a friend in you."

The child improved daily; the mother's spirits grew buoyant; the time of leaving must be drawing near. Mrs. Heath thought they would start the last of the month or the first of August, and reach home by midsummer.

A week later they were startled by a case of yellow fever in another hotel. A traveller from Tampa had fallen ill soon after arrival. He was quickly removed to the Sand Hills Hospital. The doctors pronounced it simply a sporadic case, calming for the time the rising excitement.

Mrs. Heath had been greatly alarmed, and was now more than ever anxious to get away.

"I think I can go the first of the month, don't you?"

"We will hope so. But don't be impatient; we must move carefully with the child. I'm going to walk on the veranda with her a few minutes; I believe it will do her good."

Every day Maggie had some new device to hasten the recovery. Every day the doctor nodded approval at her indefatigable energy. August came in close and hot. The little wind stirring from the east seemed impregnated with odors from the low flat country about the northeast creek, which had never been thoroughly drained. The moisture of the marshy land outlying the city filled the air and settled damp and mouldy upon everything. Unpleasant rumors were afloat, the days were heavy with the dread of coming evil; men's faces were dark with foreboding. It had flashed through the city that four new cases had been removed at midnight to St. Luke's and Sand Hills Hospital. The panic grew and hundreds left the city. Houses were closed, stores deserted, those who were able packing and preparing for speedy removal.

The plague increased. The next day five cases were reported. The board of health was in session until midnight. There was no longer

doubt; the fever was prevalent and assuming epidemic form. The people were panic-stricken, flying in pallid fear from their homes, leaving all their possessions in the care of servants or unguarded. What matter, if perchance life could be saved? Outgoing trains and boats were crowded to their full capacity. Orders were issued to have all suspicious cases of fever reported at once at headquarters. A station was opened for the fumigation of mail and baggage. Quarantine was established and committees on relief and sanitation appointed. The matter assumed alarming proportions, and Mrs. Heath was overwhelmed with terror. She besought the doctor to advise her.

"I think you had better go to Atlanta immediately. I have patients who will go at once. Join them. It is your safest course; and you also, Miss Doane."

"I don't think Mrs. Heath needs me longer. I will find a maid for her, then I shall come to you for work, doctor."

He looked upon her with admiration.

"Do you know what is before you?" he asked.

"I am strong, doctor. I can see there is to be work enough, and I should be ashamed to show my face to my friends if I could turn my back to it."

"Bravely spoken! I will furnish a nurse-maid for you, Mrs. Heath, whom you may trust; and you had better go with those who leave to-day. I think between you the little girl is saved."

Before lunch the trunks were filled and strapped, everything ready for a comfortable journey as far as Maggie's forethought and capacity could insure it. Maggie held the child as they drove to the station. Mrs. Heath felt that she was leaving a treasured friend behind, in danger. It seemed terribly cold-blooded. But even as Maggie was all devotion to her work, so must she sacrifice every other consideration to the welfare of her child. The new maid was carefully instructed, the little one made comfortable in a sleeper. Maggie would not leave until every office of love was perfected. The doctor was on hand, and as "All aboard" sounded, he bade a hasty farewell and stepped upon the platform, not before he had caught a glimpse of the young mother's tearful face as she threw her arms about the nurse in silent farewell.

Maggie was not unmoved, he saw, as she joined him; there was a half-suppressed tremble in her voice as she asked,

"What comes next, doctor? I am in your service."

"A good long night's rest, and I will see you to-morrow. The urgent need is to come. The few cases thus far are not of a malignant type. We want all the sensible help we can get, and shall no doubt stamp it out very soon. Keep yourself rested, calm, and cheerful; fear is a weakness that make rents in the walls and the citadel is shaken."

"I don't think I shall have any fear, only I *must* work. I can't be idle."

The morning found her in a soft, dark gray dress, perfectly plain, a satchel packed with a few absolute necessaries, her breakfast eaten, and waiting for orders. She had sent letters North with a note inclosed for Mrs. Kent, begging Miss Clarissa to keep the fact of her still being at the South from them. It was useless to cause them uneasiness. "And, dear auntie, don't ask me to return until my work is done. Don't be anxious; I never felt better. I am strong, and we both know that He in whose care I am is mighty."

She posted the letter. The doctor drove up as she returned, and she soon appeared with the bag and a strap holding a heavy shawl and a wrap for night.

"Is there much fever in the city, doctor?"

"I 'm not going to give you a fever patient to begin with. I have a little maid round here

who needs care. They would have left the city, but the father is in South Florida, the mother terrified, and needs cheerful help in nursing. It's not serious at all. I wont enroll you on the fever list until there is more urgent need; for then you will not be allowed on the street, and I think you like plenty of air and exercise."

"Oh I do. I hope I sha'n't be denied that; but I'm ready for anything."

"I see you are. There'll be plenty to do here for a few days. It's a bilious attack, sudden, but under control. Your new patient is a funny little thing, about twelve. Here we are."

They had turned in upon extensive grounds, in the better part of the city, where, among a wealth of uncared-for shrubbery, a large, comfortable house was half hidden. Flowers, shrubs, vines, and weeds strove for the mastery. An old colored woman came to the door at the sound of their approach.

"Praise de Lord, you's come. De missus do go on ter'ble bad, an' dat Puss mighty sassy when de grip don' shet 'er mouf."

"Not encouraging, surely," said the doctor, "but I think you'll deal wisely with Puss."

"Is that her name?"

"She is Ruth Ripley in a legal sense. Her dear friends call her Puss when pleased, otherwise Puss Rippet, on account of her claws."

"A formidable patient, doctor."

"You 'll bring her to terms. Unfortunately she is not ill enough to be reasonably submissive." He helped her to alight, and led the way into the house. It was bright, open, and cheery, but Maggie discerned a neglected air that told the failure of love's interested hand in the daily touch of household arrangements.

They went up to a large front room, where the girl was tossing uneasily in the midst of a pile of light coverings.

"They pile blankets all over me; I 'm choked," she muttered, throwing herself back among the pillows and casting a defiant glance from the doctor to Maggie, who followed him.

Mrs. Ripley immediately turned and came towards her, her face lighting with a sense of relief. Her eyes had a terrified, distressed look about them. She was worn with the care of the capricious child, and anxiously awaiting direction from the absent husband.

"Take your hat right off. I am so glad to see you."

"Well I a'n't, then," muttered the child.

"Why not, Puss?" The doctor's eyes twinkled.

"She 's white; she wont mind me."

Maggie came forward. "Do n't you like white nurses?"

"No. I can't make them mind worth a cent."

"They can make you mind; that will be better."

"Well turned!" The doctor laughed, while Miss Puss stared in blank amazement. The case had never been presented in this light.

"Can't I get up, doctor? I 'm better."

"Not to-day, unless you are anxious for a relapse."

"What 's that?"

"More of yesterday's pains—and harder."

"I hate the bed. I wish papa was at home. Mamma cries all the time. Chloe 's a cross thing."

"Well, be good to-day; to-morrow we 'll see."

He gave his directions and Maggie began a short sharp work, preparatory to the more serious labor that awaited her. At first she took no notice of the child, but went about the room with skilful hand and practised eye, arranging every article in perfect order, answering quickly Mrs. Ripley's questions and replying hopefully and soothingly to her fears and complaints, knowing that the glittering eyes of Puss were following every movement.

"Now, Mrs. Ripley, will you go and rest, and leave Puss in my care? We shall get along nicely together."

"She sha'n't go. I wont stay alone with you."

"Go right along, please. I will make her happy."

With a look of distress the mother left them together.

"I wont mind you. You sha' n't touch me."

"No? Well, never mind. We 'll fix the room prettily."

She moved about, singing in a low tone snatches of bright song, apparently taking no notice of her patient. Chloe's turbaned head was pushed within the door.

"Would missy hab some coffee, to stay de stummic a bit? Dat chile am drefful wearin'."

"Get out, Chloe!"

"Yes, Chloe, you may bring me some, and a few flowers. I saw lovely ones as we drove in."

"What you want o' them?"

"I want them for you, dear, to make you happy."

"I can't be happy."

"Why not?"

"'Cause papa are n't here, and mamma 's just a cry-baby."

"Then do n't try for your own happiness; do all you can to make mamma happy before your father gets here. That will be a grand surprise

to him. How proud he would be of his Puss. Here are the flowers. Thank you, Chloe."

The old negress had gathered a huge bunch of the largest, brightest blossoms to be found, and stood delighted at the change already apparent in the room, smiling upon "dat bad chile" in a most loving way.

"Hurry up, Chloe, and get the coffee; I want some too."

"Merciful hebbens! De doctor 'd be mighty p'voked when he fin' out dat ar."

"Yes, Chloe, you may bring a cup for Puss; a little wont hurt her."

"Den I will, for certain, if yo' tak der 'sponsibility."

"Now, Puss, the flowers look lovely to me. Do you like them?"

She nodded. There was nothing in nature she loved more.

"They are God's handiwork, bright and sweet; and I must make my little patient as sweet as the flowers before mamma wakes. We 'll have the bed all fresh and nice, and fix you up as dainty as the flowers."

"Take off the blankets; mamma piles 'em on."

"Yes, we 'll keep only one."

Deftly and with a peculiar tact Maggie bathed and robed her freshly, brushed carefully

the abundant hair, rearranged the bed, shut out the light that glared upon her face, and admitted a ray where the reflection would soothe and not irritate, then sat down waiting for the coffee.

"Do you feel better, Puss?"

"My back aches, and I'm tired, but I don't feel ugly now."

"Poor child, a little sleep will be better than coffee."

"I don't want it! I want ice!"

The coffee came; Maggie put it aside and ordered a dish of broken ice. She understood the child's nervous, irritable mood. Her object was to quiet and soothe; a pellet of ice was just the refreshment her feverish tongue craved. "Oh how good!" she murmured, and slipped her hand beneath her cheek, saying,

"Now drink your coffee, nurse. I'll be good and go to sleep."

For a few hours the stillness of peace rested upon the house. Maggie had conquered by patient forbearance and unruffled sweetness of manner. She herself had slept well the night before, but this quiet morning was refreshing. Had she known it was to be the last for many weeks she could not have rested in it more entirely.

Through the midday heat the tired mother and child slept. Meantime the publication of

new cases created a widespread panic through the city. The fever had assumed an epidemic form. Those who could not flee were terror-stricken. Citizens demanded that all suspected houses should be destroyed. In some cases their request was complied with at once; all doubtful places were searched, and most stringent measures taken to check the increase of the scourge. It required real heroism for those who remained to go on day by day doing as best they could each task and trusting God to live it through.

As Mrs. Ripley and Maggie were leaving the dining-room the next day a step on the porch startled them. They went to the hall together. Maggie caught sight of a worn-looking, travel-stained pedestrian, and heard a cry, "Frank!" The husband and wife were in each other's arms, and Maggie ran up stairs, sent Chloe to prepare refreshment that she knew he was in need of, and to keep her patient quiet until it was safe for them to meet.

He had been several months away in the vicinity of the Indian River, and learning through the signal service of the fearful state of affairs at home, and fearing for his family, he determined to start at once, and as the usual course of travel was interrupted, he made the greater part of the journey on foot, and reached them drenched, faint, and footsore.

Maggie felt that a weight had been lifted from her. She hoped she would not be needed here much longer. But in the morning the doctor found him in a high fever and at once took him in hand. He was anxious. Coming again in the afternoon, he immediately sent Mrs. Ripley to take Maggie's place while she was installed over her first fever patient. His exhaustion had predisposed him to contagion. The yellow flag was raised. From this time no member of the household could appear on the street. All supplies must come through the orders of the attending physician. Anguish and fear triumphed; Puss had no words of defiance now. She pressed her hand upon her mouth that her cry might not wring her mother's breaking heart.

It was a terrible experience for Maggie. Her powers were taxed to their limit. She was alone, only as the doctor came when he could leave other cases. From the first her patient's exhausted state was against him. The second day he became delirious, his temperature rose rapidly, and in a few hours all was over.

It was but a single scene of that dreadful day, but one home-picture of many that made up the record of that never-to-be-forgotten Black Friday.

CHAPTER XXIII.

NEW HOMES.

MISS BRAINARD rested a few days with her sister before opening her own house. They were all roused by her active spirit and her stirring tales of life at the South. The brother's affairs were rehearsed, Maggie's unfortunate detention referred to daily with increasing anxiety, and Barbara's affairs talked over with great tenderness when the girls were away from the house, as occurred daily for a few hours of walking or in the use of the bicycle, which they still greatly enjoyed.

Barbara had regained in a measure the bright, hopeful temperament natural to her, and now thought the time had come for her to make some changes in her affairs. Mrs. Hamlin's family was large enough without her. The kindness she had received was very precious to her, but she must find something to do that would enable her to pay a low board in some more humble quarter of the city. She wished they would speak first and advise her; but they were so absorbed in Miss Brainard and so troubled about Maggie they seemed to have forgotten

that she did not belong there and ought not to stay. She felt shy about pushing her own insignificant affairs in their way. She wanted them to know how sincerely grateful she was. She feared they would think her cold and unappreciative, so different from Dot—fond of quiet corners and out-of-the-way places, where she could help Becky perhaps and be overlooked and unnoticed—that it was not strange they should forget that she must have a sensitiveness in regard to her position that was growing more and more painful.

But Miss Clarissa had eyes for every one. They were sharp enough to discern the troubled waters of the orphan's heart. One forenoon, while the three girls were away, she entered the sewing-room, where her sister was advising with Becky about Dot's necessities.

"Dolly, how about little Barbara? We 've decided nothing for her. I see a shade of anxiety in her face. We must relieve her mind at once, sister."

"True. I meant to have spoken to her before. She wants to support herself in some way. It 's a cruel necessity."

"No necessity at all. She 's to have a home with me if she 'll accept it. You knew that."

"She will if you can employ her; but to place her in any home as an ornament simply

would make her wretched; she 's a busy little body."

"I see. I will propose that she take Maggie's place for the present. She loves Becky and will naturally get a home-feeling. I think, Becky, we will go out to-morrow and throw the house open and settle ourselves for fall work. We will invite Barbara to go along. It 's a lonely house without young people."

"Here she is; she will speak for herself," said Mrs. Hamlin.

The three girls came in flushed with exercise, looking inquiringly to discover who was referred to.

"Barbara, come here; sit close beside me, dear child. I 've hardly taken time to notice you, but I 've thought of you more than once; and I want you to do something for my happiness. Do n't nod that willing little brown head until you hear what it is, for you may object. You see how lonely I shall be without Maggie, and it strikes me you have nothing to do but to fill her place, if you will. To-morrow we are going to open the house. Will you help us? Becky could hardly get along without you now, and you may have the whole country to roam in and copy every flower you see. What do you say?"

She slipped a little hand shyly into Miss

Brainard's firm clasp. "I 've been thinking it is time to get some work that will support me. Do n't you think so, Mrs. Hamlin?" turning a flushed, puzzled face towards her.

"This will support you, child. Maggie and I have talked it all over. She will seldom be with me now for any length of time. Her work absorbs her and these new relatives claim her. Becky and I cannot live alone. I told Maggie I should win you to take her place. You shall be my little companion. Paint all you like; have your studio and room and be useful and happy. I 'll do nothing but pay the bills, making, you see, a very easy life for me. What do you say, child?"

"What can I say? Oh, Mrs. Hamlin, what ought I to do?"

"Just what your heart prompts. You can make sister and Becky very happy; and, my child, although you can earn a fair amount with your brush, it might be a very precarious living. I think your father would like you to accept the home, and you would be safe and happy there."

"Oh so happy!" A laugh trembled on the lips and gleamed through the tears. "How can I repay you for so much? I receive all and give nothing."

"No, indeed. You give me a bright, happy home, and that is worth more than money. So

we start to-morrow. The girls will help you pack your trunks, and after we get settled and our preserving, pickling, and the like all done, with our brave Maggie back, we 'll have the friends out to a good old-fashioned house-warming. How many trunks?"

"Only one—a little one, Miss Brainard." Barbara seemed to think the question ludicrous.

"Call me auntie, as the others do. We 'll go out this afternoon and get another and fill it for winter. Our winters are none too warm, and I like to take old Time by the forelock. So be ready soon after lunch. Will you go, Clare? You know what is worn better than I do."

It was easy for the maiden aunt to decide matters for them all. They seldom rebelled against her wise common sense and liberal spirit. Now indeed the orphan's heart was at rest. Every weight was lifted. She had trusted in the Father of the fatherless, and his blessings had been poured out upon the barrenness of her life more abundantly than she could have hoped.

This arrangement settled to the entire satisfaction of both parties, Miss Clarissa relieved her anxieties in regard to Maggie by writing to Dr. Kent, telling him the whole story without reserve, but begging him not to divulge it to the friends there. It was not best to give them

new causes for fear and disturbance. That they were not alarmed in regard to the fever she was assured. Being off the line of travel, she knew they considered themselves comparatively safe. If the doctor should go to Jacksonville she hoped he would see that Maggie was not unnecessarily exposed. She confided to him her fears and asked his opinion regarding the risk Maggie had subjected herself to.

In reply he wrote that her tidings had filled him with surprise and alarm. He had intended to offer himself. Thus far his mother had restrained him. But this decided him. He would go at once and do what he could. He would search Maggie out, watch over her, and send her North as soon as the way opened. If she could be constrained to go immediately from the city he would be glad, and by no means inform the friends of her danger. She should hear again as soon as he had reached her. This letter relieved Miss Brainard of much uneasiness. Each mail was impatiently awaited and eagerly scanned. Fumigated letters reached them every few days, always bright and hopeful.

Barbara and Clare spent an hour with Mrs. Ellis after the shopping expedition, telling her of the new plans. No mother could be more interested than the invalid as the girls clustered round her great comfortable chair; and while

she listened to Barbara's good fortune her face beamed kindly upon the young girl who had so appealed to her sympathy by this late bereavement.

From there they went to share the news with Nellie and Etta. Barbara and Hale were still rare friends. The little fellow was old enough now to attend school, a real grief to his devoted sister, who would have kept him with her and under her instruction indefinitely.

"As soon as Maggie gets back auntie is to give a family party and you are all to be there, and then Bab will be in town often. Oh we shall not be long apart."

"It's a lovely arrangement," said Nellie, and they all echoed her decision.

There was one more call to make before Barbara should leave town. It must be made in the school, for she had never learned where Miss Gray hid herself. "And there will be just time before she leaves for home."

They went together. The good news was repeated to a most sympathetic listener. Barbara's few friends rejoiced with her. Her quiet, glad peace had a restful atmosphere about it.

The next day witnessed Barbara's introduction to her new home. Miss Brainard took her into every room. It was a large old-fashioned, well-constructed house, carefully kept, and was

still in excellent condition. The massive oaken front door was cut through the middle to be opened each way into a hall of generous dimensions, from which a broad staircase led to the upper floors, its carven baluster of dark rich mahogany and its heavy wainscotting meeting upon the next landing the tall antique clock that had tolled off the hours for Miss Clarissa's grandparents, and was still ready to sing its old-time song in the same true measure. Maggie's room looked from the east upon the distant river. It was not to be disturbed, but kept ready for her, come when she might.

"You may have a choice, Barbara, between this one over the living-room and looking into the garden, and the front room facing the street. This little one over the hall is for your studio, and you may furnish it as you please. It has a north outlook, and I believe that is what artists like."

There were several guest-rooms, all with the quaint ancient furnishings that charmed Barbara's artist-eye. She decided upon the east room. The garden attracted her, and it may be its proximity to Becky's was a factor in her decision, for she had a very tender feeling towards the old Scotch woman.

"And now, my child, go anywhere, look into everything, get a home-feeling as soon as you

can, and if you have anything that you used to enjoy and would like in your rooms, we will send and have it brought as soon as you decide."

How thoughtful and kind she could be! Barbara was overwhelmed. There was much still to live for.

Meantime Uncle Eric had confided to his sister-in-law certain hopes he had for a long time secretly cherished. Would she give him "God-speed"?

"Most gladly, Eric. Is it indeed so? Nothing could be more charming. You have my best wishes. I am sure you cannot fail. I admire her greatly, and our girls love her as well as they do you. Ah yes, nothing could be better."

With her encouraging words ringing in his ears and mingling with a voice beloved never absent from his heart, he walked through the moonlight towards Miss Gray's humble home, determined now to win or lose her. She had spent a busy day; teaching was growing more irksome. Her incentive to work had been removed; there was no satisfaction in laboring for herself. She knew her old nurse could earn without her far more than she could give her; and life stretched out way beyond, as far as she could see, like an endless, glaring, dusty highway before a worn-out traveller. Now, seated in a large chair, with the moonlight shedding

its soft radiance over her, she rested. The low, monotonous humming of the old nurse reached her from the farther room and pleasant memories of Jack and the girls dear to her mingled with her shrinking from the cares of life.

A step on the stair and a low knock roused her from the revery. She looked up; the smile that greeted him was very pleasant to the master. "Mr. Hamlin! Come in; I'm glad to see you."

"I was not quite sure of a welcome; but nothing venture, you know," he said with a quiet laugh.

"Not sure of a welcome? You cannot think me so ungrateful?" she answered.

"There is no call for gratitude, Miss Gray, and you have been very shy, even to your friends—but I think you trust me now."

"Entirely; how could I help it? Excuse me, I will get a lamp."

"No, Miss Gray, sit here in the moonlight; I have something to tell you."

"Of Jack?" she asked with animation.

"Not of Jack this time, of myself—if I may."

Thus in the upper room, with the bright moonbeams revealing all the deep emotions portrayed upon her beautiful face, the master won her love and her consent to be his bride.

It was not long before the home was made,

not long before the pale face bloomed again with the delicately tinted roses of her earlier youth. It was a quiet wedding in early evening in the church where for years the master had sat with his brother's family. Only the near friends were present. Aunt Clarissa and Barbara came in. The bride was in travelling dress, and after the ceremony they went away for a few weeks, it having been arranged that nurse should be installed in the new home and ready to welcome them on their return.

The bride was warmly congratulated by the few who had welcomed her to their circle. Among those most valued were Mrs. Ellis and Jack, who still called the master's wife his deliverer from the evil that came so near crowding out all goodness and ruining for ever his better nature.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PLAGUE-STRICKEN CITY.

OUR whole nation shared in the terrible visitation upon the fair land of flowers, the beautiful sunny South. Throughout the vast country the thrilling tidings were eagerly sought and grievously deplored, and yet no pen could reveal to the millions who scanned the daily news the terrible reality; none outside the doomed city could comprehend its condition—the sickening dread of those compelled to remain, looking death steadily in the face four dreary months, watching as day after day husband or wife, father, mother, or child sickened and died before their eyes and were buried from their sight.

Within the city, confined by stern necessity, were sixteen thousand souls, more than three-fourths of these without employment or resource, from the utter demoralization of business and the flight of employers.

Hotels, restaurants, bakeries were closed. Markets were empty; farmers and producers feared to approach with supplies. Terrible deprivation was imminent. Provisions were almost unobtainable. Families who had never

known the sensation of hunger were found to be in actual need, denying themselves in courageous silence that the sick might be first relieved. Over six thousand people were to be fed daily. Rations must be given out sufficient for the week by the district physician's order, each case carefully investigated. The Auxiliary Sanitary Association performed unparalleled labor. It would be impossible to estimate the amount of benefit coming to the sufferers through this source, so freely, nobly, and gratuitously rendered.

The necessities of those remaining in the city, surrounded as they were by contagion, sickness, and death, must be supplied, their daily needs met, or order and safety could not be maintained. Money must be raised to provide work for strong idle men, for all able to labor, and food for others; funds for the care of the sick, for hospitals, physicians, and nurses.

Until they were actually obliged to accept, the citizens nobly declined the charity freely offered by the nation. But as the pestilence spread, as their needs increased, and danger to the surrounding country magnified, they found it impossible to cope with the enemy alone; and from that time money and supplies flowed into their hands without stint.

This little company forming the relief corps,

who shut themselves away from hope and safety, were inspired with the same courage that impels the soldier to face death for his country and home. Maggie remained with Mrs. Ripley until after the burial of her husband. Now all was over, and she found it nearly impossible to separate herself from them. Puss clung to her with screams of nervous terror. The mother pleaded with the doctor to urge her to remain. The old negress besought her to stay. Her heart was torn with conflicting emotions. She would gladly, in their loss and fright, have given herself to them, had she been able. She placed before them the needs of the sick and dying, the scarcity of nurses, and her own strong impulse to help in this terrible crisis. She had already been with them longer than she ought. She must take up the work now; and turning to the doctor, her sensitive face betraying the emotion called up by their pitiful dependence upon her, she begged him to set her at work.

And now indeed her work began in earnest. Patient after patient passed under her care. At one time three in one family needed her services. Many recovered; some died with a suddenness that appalled her. The doctor, knowthat she was unacclimated, gave her the mildest cases; not that there was less fear from contagion, but that the labor was lighter and anxiety

less. But there came a time when there was little chance to select, when the dread visitant marched on with fearful strides, when physicians and nurses were worn down with extra work. New cases appeared daily, and there was scarce breathing space for those who strove to conquer in this hand-to-hand conflict.

Maggie's courage never faltered. She learned quickly to note the different forms of the disease, to distinguish when a stimulant was needed, cooling drinks to allay fever, or bits of broken ice to assuage thirst. She inspired her patients with the courage that possessed her own brave spirit. She suffered in their agony, would have borne their pain if she could. Her ministrations were unremitting.

In one case friends despaired and physicians were doubtful. The almost hopeless state preceding sudden death had been reached. Through it all Maggie's faith held firm. Thirty-six hours her watch continued; her efforts never ceased until she had battled with every progressive stage of the disease and conquered each. They watched her in hopeless amazement. It seemed to them like working over the dead. The convulsive agony subsided, the pain was checked, the raging fever abated, the sudden chill was prevented, the temperature and pulse gradually assumed a nearly normal condition, the flush

of the face passed slowly off, the bloodshot eyes held a more natural look. The fearful danger was nearly over, and Maggie felt a sense of triumph mingled with a childlike faith in her Father's power to save. She held out until assured of her patient's safety, then her energy disappeared. Her charge was given into safe hands, and exhausted she sought rest. A quick tepid bath, a tumbler of hot lemonade, and sleep —life-giving sleep, a whole day and night of it— restored her. The radiant spirit of perfect health triumphed, and she came again to the front, the bloom of her cheek less brilliant, the tall strong frame slighter than before, but as ready for work as ever.

It was at this crisis that Aunt Clarissa's letter reached Dr. Kent. He had secretly chafed at being held by ties he could not rupture without seeming cruelty. This letter turned the scale in favor of the work. His wife and mother must give him up, call up all the courage they possessed and trust him to the care of the mighty One. He pledged himself to caution, but go he must. Had they known the presence of Maggie in that city of destruction, no power would have kept Ned back. He would have gone with the doctor and offered himself as nurse had not all the forces of home and neighborhood held him; but the doctor guarded his secret closely.

He was warmly welcomed by the overtaxed physicians, and at once assigned a district. His first work, however, was to search out his cousin. A few inquiries brought the reply,

"Ah you mean Nurse Maggie, Miss Doane; she 's doing splendid work. She 's at St. Luke's now."

"I must see her; then I am ready."

They met in the ward. For a moment she fixed her large dark eyes upon him as though in doubtful uncertainty, as though her vision misled her. Then her whole countenance brightened, her eyes looking into his with such a glad light of welcome that his fears vanished. He said to himself, "It is God's own work. He has set her in a high place. What am I that I should question it?"

From that hour he took up the task that fell to him with an ardor equal to her own. Every evening they met and compared notes; every evening letters went North and South, his friends still being kept in ignorance of her presence there. She was isolated no longer; a friend stood by her side. He understood her nature; he sympathized in her enthusiasm; there was the same high principle inspiring both, the same self-renunciation, the same impulse to conquer in this frightful battle, even though life itself must be sacrificed.

That the rate of deaths was eventually so small, compared with the number of sick, was not altogether owing to the mildness of the fever, but largely to the increasingly watchful care the patients received and to the sanitary regulations strictly enforced. The daily inspection of houses was persevered in, the cleansing and purifying of all doubtful places in and about the city. Several hundred men were employed in this work, their wages securing for themselves and their families a comfortable support.

There were many noble acts of unrecorded heroism among the blacks. They manifested no hesitation in visiting the sick, watching or nursing the most malignant cases without fear of danger, caring for and burying the dead, guarding the deserted homes and property of those who had fled. They seemed impelled by a high sense of duty and a Christlike spirit.

Fruit was a necessity to the convalescents, the Northern apple as grateful to them as the golden orange; and when seventy-three barrels were distributed at one time their gratitude was pleasant to witness.

Each day pitiable cases were presented to the commissioners, sometimess too late for relief. In South Jacksonville the spread of the fever filled the residents with renewed terror. Many moved away or camped in the adjacent woods.

At last the days were growing cooler; there was more activity on the streets; men's faces were less gloomy; the fever was decreasing, and the hope of frost brought with it a brighter outlook. Maggie began to anticipate the homeward journey; she would soon be free to drop her work. Then a few days of quarantine and she would be in the midst of friends eager to welcome her home. Now she was to have a whole long night's rest. For once she found time to think of herself; she realized her need of rest, that she was worn down and had lost ground the last few weeks. She hoped it was only fatigue, and that sleep in large doses would conquer it. Her substitute was on hand, fresh and willing, when notice was brought her that a colored girl waited outside to see her. Going to the door, she found Chloe's daughter Julie.

"Oh, Miss Maggie, they 've sent for you! Come quick; the missus got the fever. Puss do go on crazy-like."

"Mrs. Ripley sick! Wait, I will go."

She reported to the matron, hastily prepared herself, called a carriage, and went with the girl. She had forgotten her need of sleep; but as she leaned back the old sense of languor returned. What could it mean? She would not yield to it. She gathered together her waning energies, put away the thought of weariness, lifted one short

prayer for strength to hold out to the end, and pressed on. Her courage was renewed, her determination strengthened. She felt almost equal to the effort.

To Julie there was salvation in her touch; wondrous stories of her endurance, her persistent efforts and almost unvarying success, had given to the imaginative colored people a faith in Nurse Maggie that was the result of their easily aroused superstitions. She found the physician there, glad to see her, Puss in the room stubbornly resisting every effort to remove her, and Mrs. Ripley suffering greatly. She knew what to do and went to work at once. The sick woman could only look the gratitude she felt, and Maggie was repaid. But for the first time in her work Maggie feared to be alone with the patient. Chloe was to remain in an adjoining room.

After the first hours of the night Maggie's courage waned. She seemed to have so little to work upon. Mrs. Ripley's grief had left no reserve force. The disease met no barrier to resist its course. She was like a wilted flower; a breath would scatter every petal.

Maggie labored almost hopelessly; she felt her own endurance giving way, her strength failing. But though stricken down she could not abate her fervor. Mrs. Ripley's attack had

been sudden and found a ready victim; loss of appetite long indulged, the languor of days when grief mastered her, all the weakening influences of this dark experience, overcame her and sapped the slight power of resistance; and to Maggie the case looked hopeless from the first.

Graver symptoms appeared towards morning: the scarce perceptible pulse, the terrible cold sweats, convulsive chills, the deathlike stupor; and Maggie knew that man was helpless to save. Before daylight she despatched Chloe for the doctor, and renewed her unavailing efforts, everything she could think of that might help.

In a moment of relief the patient asked,

"Shall I die?"

Maggie looked pitifully into the eyes seeking hers. They held her, she could not evade them.

"Oh trust the Saviour, dear!"

"I will, I do. But my child!"

"Trust him for her too. Have no fear; she shall be cared for. I will see to it."

A look of ineffable satisfaction appeared on the face. Maggie gave no second thought to this impulsive pledge to the dying mother. It came to her later in all its force.

For the first time in her work she lost courage. She saw the sick one slipping from her grasp; she could do absolutely nothing to help her. Every vestige of her own strength was

leaving her. She felt strange chills creeping over her, a tremor that sent a thrill of fear through her, not for herself, but that she might not hold out to the last; and she must not fail her friend. But she held out bravely till the doctor came.

Mrs. Ripley was unconscious when he appeared.

"This is sudden: her grief left her no chance," he said, as he closely regarded the sick woman.

She remained for a while in this state, rallying at times and speaking farewell words of hope, and then all was over.

Maggie had kept up till this moment, but now gave way to utter exhaustion and sank down.

"I must stop," she said; "I 'm sick, doctor."

"I think you are," was the grim reply.

With Chloe's help he took her to another room. She shook with chills. Julie was called, sent for hot water and blankets, Maggie herself directing them. The doctor hastened to inform her cousin and secure the best nurse on his list.

The physician soon returned with plenty of help. Dr. Kent was there almost as quickly. Maggie was sure that everything would go well now, and she gave herself up to the inevitable.

"I think it 's only a cold, doctor," she ventured.

"We will hope so."

The chill had passed, a high fever followed, and its progress was rapid. Unknown to herself she had repelled its subtle advances for some days. It was now upon her in its full force. She could not longer resist; it must run its course. She had fought bravely but was conquered. They hardly feared for her at first, there was so much in her favor—life had been so abundant, youth so full of buoyancy and vigor, her whole physical and moral nature so free from weakness, her courage so inspiring, her childlike faith so serene. But like a bird shot on the wing she had fallen. Tender hearts watched prayerfully, gentle hands cared for her as she went with slow, reluctant step to the very verge of the unseen. The fever racked her cruelly, clutching every fibre of her being with an almost fatal grasp. For days they would not yield one iota of their faith in her recovery. How could they harbor a thought of death in connection with this brave soul, in whom the glory of life had shone with such superabundant lustre? Her cousin would not leave her; he watched with anxious care and but half-concealed fear, increasing every hour.

How fast she talked! How full of strange fancies the disconnected speech! How memory returned to the harrowing scenes of her child-

hood, calling up the terrors that had long been forgotten. Would the bright young light go out? Must they watch her fade before their eyes, with no power to save?

Dr. Kent believed in prayer. He would plead for the life of the young martyr. He would not keep her danger longer from her friends. He felt his need of their help. He would confide in his mother. Her faith was so triumphant, she lived so near the mercy-seat, surely God would answer graciously his aged handmaid. He poured out his very soul to the mother and wife. He sent the bitter tidings North. It was like putting out the midday sun to each. How precious she had made herself to all who knew and loved her!

The day of the crisis came. Maggie had rallied enough to awaken a fresh hope. Both physicians were with her. The nurse had never ceased her efforts. Everything had been done that human skill was capable of. They waited breathlessly for the result. Delirium had subsided. She was still and white as marble: the black lashes contrasted painfully with the death-like appearance of the face. Gradually their hopes returned. Her eyes opened with a strange, dreamlike vacancy. How feeble the awaking! It was like the first faint gasp of a new life; a breath might blow it out. A little stimulant

was given, by-and-by a few drops of nourishment, and still they waited until weary of the lagging hours. They exchanged glad looks as she weakly opened her eyes and recognized her cousin. A wan little smile quivered about her mouth. He took her hand and pressed it gently without speaking.

"I shall live!" she whispered.

"Yes indeed; we shall keep you." How full his heart was! His strong pleading had been heard and graciously answered. His heart had been moved as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind. The burden which had apparently rested upon him alone was lifting. The reaction had begun; she would live.

That night telegrams flew North and South with the glad news of her safety. The next morning found a marked improvement. She welcomed her cousin with a bright smile.

"Yellow as an orange," he said, returning her look.

"Oranges are good, cousin."

"You shall have some at once."

She looked pleased. She had not yet much desire for anything.

At the foot of the bed in the shadow a little figure crouched. Dr. Kent peered at it with surprise and disapproval.

"What 's here, nurse?"

"It 's the child whose mother died a few days ago. She got in last night; no persuasion will move her. I did not care for a scene; she 's quiet."

"But it 's unsafe for her."

"No, it is n't. I 'm too bad to die! I wish I could."

The high treble tones, full of the pathos of a child's grief, touched him. Dr. Kent went towards her, looked pityingly into the eyes that returned a half-frightened, half-defiant stare.

"I wont go. She 'll die too!" she whispered. Maggie heard her.

"No, Puss darling, I shall soon be well. Let her stay, cousin; she 's no trouble."

He drew her to him and took her on his knee. She made no resistance, searched his face, then dropped her frowsy head upon his breast and shook with sobs she could not suppress.

"My little girlie!" His tender nature could not bear such utter misery. "We shall have you down if this continues. Look here; I want you to help me. We 'll get Miss Doane well in no time if you 'll take hold with us. Will you?"

"I wish I could. If she dies I shall too."

"Oh she is better, only she must n't be fretted by your crying. Now go get some breakfast; my nurses must eat well. Tell the Auntie

to give you a cup of coffee and an egg; then make your hair look nice and come back. I 'll give you something to do."

"You wont go?"

"Not a bit till I see you hard at work. Bring a few flowers." She smiled and nodded; a little ray of light flickered over the haggard face as she glanced towards the bed and slipped from the room. A fragment of the child's burden had been lifted.

Maggie dropped into a light sleep before she returned; everything looked more encouraging. The morning was clear and cooler—no mist with its depressing influence; the atmosphere was filled with life and cheer. Old Chloe's heart was lighter, and when Puss demanded her breakfast in gentler tones than her wont, Chloe's voice responded in more cheery measure than for many a day. She tempted the appetite of the forlorn girl in every way she was capable of, and rejoiced at the slightest success.

A happier-looking girl took the flowers to the sick-room and stood before the doctor ready for orders.

"Can you make good lemonade?"

"Splendid!"

"Not too sweet."

"I know," with a comprehensive nod.

"Then your work will be to make the cool

drink as nicely as you can, get fresh flowers every day, and prepare an orange. Eat a good dinner or you wont be strong enough to do all I shall require."

She looked almost happy.

There was no delay in the progress of recovery now; step by step the changes came; weakness was conquered, and slowly and surely health came back. Before many weeks she would present the same glowing embodiment of life as before, and the sick-room was the brightest spot in the house. Those clear autumn days, rich in the golden rays of a Southern sun, bright with the crisp sparkle of the frosty, invigorating air, did more for Maggie than all else combined.

She felt strong enough before the week passed to talk with the family physician about the future of the orphan girl. She knew there were no near friends and but a small property. The house had been rented and must be given up. The doctor thought she must be sent to some family school. There seemed no other way to dispose of her. That would be safe, and if ever child needed discipline Puss did.

She was called, and in the most alluring terms the good doctor laid the matter before her, expecting her instant acquiescence. "You 'd like to be with a lot of nice girls, Puss?"

"No, I should hate it. I sha' n't go!"

"Ah-h-h! The little rebel! What 's to be done?"

She was too much for the doctor; he gnawed his grisly moustache with perplexity and laughed helplessly at Maggie.

"My poor motherless Puss, I wont leave you. You shall go North with me. I know Aunt Clarissa too well to fear. I promised to care for you. We will go together."

"Will we! will we!" She sprang up, danced and laughed with glee, then in a fervor of love devoured Maggie with kisses.

Thus it was arranged. Clare and Julie packed under Maggie's direction all she thought best for Puss to retain of household effects. Much was sold, and in preparations for the journey her sorrow lost its bitterest sting.

The last Monday of November was long remembered for its cheering record; not a single new case reported the previous day. During the night the thermometer fell rapidly and the frost had come. All this week the army of glad laborers worked with a will to put every corner of the city into gala-day order for the returning refugees.

On Thursday of that week the entire population flocked to the churches for thanksgiving services. A special train from Fernandina, with

a company of its citizens, arrived to share in the rejoicing. Hospitals were closed, nurses returned to their homes after a short detention at Camp Perry, and very soon hundreds of refugees could be seen coming in by teams, steamers, rowboats, and cars. The greetings were jubilant. The stay-at-homes were as glad to welcome them as they were to return.

Then a strong, full, heartfelt vote of gratitude and thanks went out to the whole country which had so grandly supported them under this fearful dispensation.

At last Maggie was ready to start for home. Puss was quivering with excitement. Dr. Kent was assisting in the final preparations, when a stifled cry from Maggie attracted the doctor's notice, and turning to the door he found himself face to face with Ned.

"Well done, old fellow! How came you here? What 's the matter?"

"I was on the way to Aunt Clarissa and thought I 'd stop and see you."

"Welcome, Ned! You 're just in time to take care of my patient. She 's to start to-morrow."

"May I, Maggie?" he asked.

"Oh, Ned, I shall be so glad!"

"Are they all well at home?" broke in the doctor.

"All well."

CHAPTER XXV.

WELCOME HOME.

AUNT CLARISSA was at her sister's to meet the returning party. Ned sent no word in advance of his coming; only Maggie and the little girl were expected. Barbara remained at Stanton Falls with Becky to help in the welcome of the following day.

They expected to see the ambitious young nurse a mere wreck after the summer's strain and serious illness; therefore a night's rest in the city was thought desirable. The home was gay with hope and bright as love could make it to greet her, dearer to all for the peril she had passed through.

It was nearly time for the train. Uncle Eric was to meet her. His wife waited with them. Clare joined the impatient Dot at the window for a first sight of the carriage. It was coming, had turned into the driveway, was before the the door. What an air of triumph the coachman had, as though, Clare thought, he had brought them all the way from the fever region. He sprang from his seat, threw wide the door. Uncle Eric was out and lifting a mite of humanity in black to the walk, and—

"Auntie! auntie!" called Clare, "it is Ned! It 's surely Cousin Ned with Maggie! Oh!"

She followed Dot, who had sped to the hall, had been folded in Maggie's arms, rapturously kissed her cousin, and was tenderly greeting the bewildered stranger.

"Maggie, child!"

"Oh, Aunt Clarissa!" Maggie sobbed and laughed nervously as she clung to her.

"Give us a chance, sister. Here 's poor Ned waiting to be recognized."

Mrs. Hamlin had seldom seen her sister so overcome. She hastened to turn the tide that all might share in the greetings. Dot had taken Puss for her especial charge, divesting the child of her extra wrappings in the most familiar manner.

"Ned, you sly boy, why didn't you write me? Maggie is about as much as I can take in with safety to my mental balance."

"Had n't time, auntie. It was a sudden resolve. I wanted to consult you about the building upon that lot you selected."

"Very much you did! Well, it shall be settled before you go back. But, Maggie child, you look nearly as fresh as ever, a trifle thinner and a little big-eyed."

"It 's difficult to credit your sickness, Maggie, with those cheeks before us; I hardly be-

lieve it. Was she very sick, Puss?" Uncle Eric pinched the child's ear.

"Awful!" her great staring black eyes fixed seriously on his and her voice as grave as the fact itself had been.

Mr. Hamlin found a merry company at dinner, and evinced in his way as much interest in Maggie's safe return as any. They were bent upon making a heroine of her. Much as they had suffered from fear, they were now filled with pride and triumph. They felt that each had a part in the glorious sacrifice. Had they not yielded her to the fearful demand, ignorant, to be sure, of her danger? Had they not shared in the terror, the doubts, now also in the glad consummation? And Maggie received it as the warm-hearted delight of dear friends in her safe home-coming. Her joy was enveloped in the lovely mantle of humility. Christ, her divine Master, had given her the work, had accepted the lowly consecration of herself to his service. She had obeyed his word, loving to "abide in him," feeling assured that her success, whether much or little, had come through his love and her dependence upon him. He had said years before, in plain language that she could understand, "If ye love me, keep my commandments," and the aim of her life since had been to dwell in that love, which is the only safe guide of any

life. Now, nearly well and strong as ever, she was ready to go on with the work he had appointed.

The buzz of conversation went steadily on. There was much to learn, much to tell.

Ned inquired of Clare about Jack.

"He is studying in Germany—has been away but a few months."

"How *could* Mrs. Ellis let him go?"

"She is stronger, Maggie, and so self-sacrificing, you know."

"I don't call it a sacrifice to do what adds to our own happiness." Aunt Clarissa spoke in her usual sharp style.

"Why, auntie, a year's absence does n't bring his mother happiness. She never seemed to thrive but in his presence. She misses him hourly."

"No doubt, Clare; but his success will bring a higher satisfaction than his presence would without it. There are degrees of happiness. He 's a kind of protégé of yours, Agnes, I believe."

"Hardly that, but a dear friend. We have great faith in him."

"And Burr, Clare? He was one of the circle; quiet, but a first-rate fellow, I thought."

"Yes, indeed, Ned. Burr is Clare's favorite, because Etta 's her chum, I suppose. He 's a bookworm too," interrupted Dot.

"What is he doing, Clare?" he asked, noticing the flush that came and quickly faded from the young girl's face.

"He is studying for the ministry."

"Good! The fellows are all getting ahead of me."

"Your time will come, Ned, and you are not standing still now, my boy," said his aunt.

"Is Etta as devoted to Hale as ever?"

"Yes; they are inseparable."

"Well, young people, we must have one grand gathering before Ned goes back—bring the friends together. When do you go, Ned?"

"How long will you keep me?"

"Ah that's the point. We'll talk that over after we settle about the merry-making. Clare may be mistress of ceremony, only make it informal. We can't have Jack, but Etta and her brothers, and that Nellie I have so disapproved of, though Barbara has a tender feeling for her now. Come early, make it a five o'clock affair, and catch the late train home. Will that be stylish enough?"

"Auntie, it will be delightful."

"Well, to-morrow afternoon Maggie, Puss, and I will go home. Ned will stay here until I've had Maggie a few days to myself. By the way, what's this child's name? I don't intend to ring the changes on that ridiculous cognomen."

"Her name is Ruth Ripley, auntie; but—"

"Well, call her Ruth, then."

"I like Puss best," muttered the girl, a sudden flash gleaming from her black eyes.

Uncle Eric, who pitied the little object, whispered, "Ruthie is the prettiest. Cats have claws and scratch. Little maidens like you are nicer than cats."

She nestled closer and smiled in his face. Aunt Agnes had drawn near and was making friends with the little stranger. She had never been in so merry a company and was becoming quite content.

Evening brought Etta and Nellie with a glad welcome for the new-comers. Nellie had learned in the days they were helping Barbara to respect Maggie's steadfast character and self-denying life; the young nurse's heroic qualities had won her admiration. She was growing magnanimous, even to retreating nearly out of sight, in her enthusiasm over the two girl friends, and very winning, as forgetting her own charms she portrayed those of Barbara.

Clare left the circle to consult her aunt about the invitations.

"To-day is Wednesday. Ned can stay ten days longer. Will next Tuesday do?"

"Nicely. Shall I ask them now and send to Burr at once?"

"Yes. Have Etta bring Hale for Ruth to enjoy."

"I will; that will be nice."

Miss Brainard omitted nothing that would add pleasure to any. Her life had been spent for others; once more the old home walls should ring with merriment. They would count up their mercies and be glad, young and old together.

Nellie was happy to be again one of the circle. There was evident delight in meeting her former teacher, and with a half-laugh she said, "I know I shall forget and call you Miss Gray."

"The name still seems to belong to me. You must come to my home, Nellie, with Clare, and learn to know me outside the schoolroom."

"I will. I want to tell you something too;" she lowered her voice. "I never dreamed I was being so hateful till dear Bab saved me from burning. Oh, Miss Gray, how could you be so patient with me!"

"The patience, Nellie, was very slight. I believed you would some time learn to know Barbara and would love her."

"I do love her. I can't help it."

The next day Barbara flitted excitedly about the house, arranging the large rooms until a luxurious air of comfort pervaded them, and even her exquisite taste suggested nothing more. A

fire blazed on every open hearth ; the great hall stove sent out its glowing heat, radiating from all points and pervading every corner of the generous space and ample stairway. Maggie's room was glowing with the prodigal splendor of autumn leaves, clumps of sumach buds, and running vines splendid with ripe tints. It was a dream of Indian summer.

Barbara caught sight from the window of the "accommodation," as the station conveyance was termed, being drawn as fast as the half-fed horse was able to move it with its unusual load. A swift rustling movement took her to the door, calling, as she passed the great sunny kitchen,

"They are here, Becky!"

"Praise the Lord!" came from her odorous domain; and the tall, lank form, in shining black alpaca in honor of the occasion, stood in the doorway.

Barbara was already at the carriage-door with arms about Maggie.

The child, an object of interest, was received agreeably and ministered to kindly by Becky. Puss was soon attracted to that cheery corner of the house. The variety of dainties spread before her in the well-filled pantry proved a tempting bait to the hungry, sad-looking girl, whose change of climate had given her a ravenous appetite.

Maggie drew a long breath of thorough satisfaction in finding herself at home. How glad she was; the measure of joy full to overflow! How bright to have Bab flitting about her like a cheerful little brown sparrow, to see Becky's joy and Aunt Clarissa's increased content. She wandered from room to room, noticed all Barbara's dainty touches, softening the severity of the old-style furnishing, and rummaged in all the closets and chests of drawers for toys and games to amuse Ruth. Nothing suited the child so entirely as the old settle in the warm corner of the kitchen, with Becky's lazy tabby curled beside her purring in the sun. Ruth missed the summer warmth she had been accustomed to, though Aunt Clarissa prophesied a benefit from the change in due time.

Ned appeared Saturday forenoon in the midst of preparation for the coming festivity. He was eager for a confidential talk with Aunt Clarissa. She felt it in the air, but bluffed him off until his face told her it must come or there would be an explosion.

"There, girls, Becky does n't want you round any longer. The cake is perfect and she prefers to get dinner alone. You may take Ruth and rest an hour. Ned, come with me. We 'll plan for that tent at the South."

The cheery living-room, its windows gay

with blossoms, its open fireplace sending out rays of light and heat, was just the place for Ned's confidential interview with his aunt. He drew his chair near the blaze and stood by the high mantel, nervously fingering the quaint ornaments of an older time.

"Now, Ned, what is it? I've had no chance for a talk with you, so much to say to Maggie. So the land is really cleared?"

"All ready for your plan, auntie."

"Well, this evening you young people may try your skill at plans. It will interest you all. I believe Barbara could carry out my idea. Is it a pretty spot?"

"Oh it's fine, auntie. You must remember, between the doctor's and the old hummock road; everything cleared away but a few oaks, ready to be planted with Bermuda grass. There will be a fine slope of lawn to the lake."

"And you want to begin soon to build?"

"This winter if you like."

"H'm, if I like. Now, Ned, did you really come all the way on here to consult me about this—only this?"

"No." He looked into her eyes with a flush that passed and a quiver of the lip he tried to control.

She would not help him.

"The house is for you all if brother and your

mother prefer it to their own cosey place. I only want a wing for winter use; and now what more can I do, Ned?"

"Mother likes the old place too well to change."

"No? What then?"

"Oh, auntie, you know well enough. *Don't* quiz me. I want to make a home there for Maggie." He came and stood before her.

"For Maggie! Well, she is of age, she can speak for herself."

"Do you consent?"

"Does *she*?"

"I don't quite know. I came first for your 'God-speed,' Aunt Clarissa."

She could hold out no longer.

"You have it, Ned, with all my heart; you have earned it. Nothing could make me happier; nothing could be better."

He kissed her, with eyes full of love and thanks.

It was a quiet engagement, the natural result of a friendship that had moved calmly on from childhood. At least Ned remembered the tender pity that sprang up in his boyish heart long ago, on that stormy morning, as the homeless waif fixed her large despairing eyes on Aunt Clarissa's face, silently pleading for the love and protection so generously given since, given in

His name who had said, "Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me."

Auntie, who may or may not have passed through a like experience—the young people never knew—drew Barbara and Puss with her into Becky's quarters, ostensibly to prepare Maggie's favorite dish; and as they all met at table, the triumph on Ned's face and the grateful love shining from Maggie's dark eyes in response to auntie's questioning glance, revealed her pure joy to the elder friend.

That evening the four clustered around the table with material for making plans for a Southern home.

"You don't want it like your father's place, Ned, or so extensive as the doctor's?"

"No, mother likes the old cracker home, though, now it is remodelled."

"This is the dearest home I know; why not have it like this?"

"Ah, Maggie, this would not do at all for a lakeside cottage at the South. It would be as incongruous as an elephant in a flower garden. We want plenty of space on the ground, nothing extra simply to be burdensome, with closets everywhere and verandas all the way round. Now see which of you will do the best."

There was great merriment over the unusual efforts, the partial success or entire failure.

"I can make plenty of lovely rooms, but I don't know where to put closets, windows or doors, nor the slightest chance to locate a chimney," laughed Maggie.

Ned brought forward a very symmetrical oblong box, resembling a tool-chest divided into compartments by two broad passageways running at right angles; but how to furnish more than four rooms without using the cover of the box was a mystery to him.

It was Barbara who succeeded in throwing the first clear light upon the subject. Her neat slip held a well-proportioned ground-plan, with breezy halls running from door to door, as Aunt Clarissa had described, and plenty of rooms opening upon the veranda, that, partially covered, encircled the house and connected it with a separate building for cooking.

"How did you do it? One would think you had been there, little Barby."

"I have in dreams, Maggie. It's only putting auntie's ideas on paper; but I think it would puzzle the builder to carry it out."

"No, it would n't. An architect would get your idea at once. You've hit the mark, Barbara," said Ned gayly.

"It's certainly very nice, child. There are the family rooms, with windows and doors convenient, and generous closets. Here is my

corner, with a nest for yourself—and that reminds me."

She went to an ancient carved desk, richly colored by age, standing upon high, claw-footed legs in a distant corner, its brass trimmings reflecting light from the smouldering coals; opening the doors she drew from a compartment an old ledger-shaped book which she placed before them.

"I don't know, Ned, but you'll be interested in items put down here by your ancestor far back who built the home."

"Indeed I should. I didn't know such a thing existed."

"This very house we are in?" asked Maggie.

"Yes, Maggie, this very house, just as it was built in 1757, and all the items of its construction registered in these quaint characters for future generations to puzzle over. Look, Ned."

He was absorbed at once.

"See here, this is a bill for 'ye boards,' and another for 'ye keg of nails.' Here comes in the timber cut and hewn, and farther along 'the soldiers of the Revolution were confined here.' There are items of the cost of each meal. They lived well in those times. Our great-great-grandfather was a methodical old gentleman, auntie. Over a hundred years old! and the house looks good for another hundred."

These carefully penned accounts, with their ancient orthography, absorbed them until Aunt Clarissa warned them of the lateness of the hour, and that they must be fresh for the Sabbath.

The Tuesday gathering brought a chorus of congratulatory greetings for Ned and Maggie. Their plans were discussed with deep interest. The entire circle wished them abundant happiness. Maggie was the bright star among them. She carried herself royally; her life-work had come early to her; she had succeeded even beyond auntie's hopes, whose faith in her had received no check from the moment she began her new duties. And as she took her place at the table for the younger guests, in a cosey supper-room apart from the elders, she was conscious that an unexpected blessing had crowned her life. An earnest desire was formed in her soul to continue to live for others, a determination to minister in God's world to all who needed any help she was capable of giving.

Burr and Ned stood near to take the old, fragile china, with its fragrant beverage, to the scattered groups, while bubbling laughter and merry chatter filled the room. Long months of labor, pain, and disaster were forgotten; joy and brightness triumphed. Hale and Ruth were everywhere, their favorite rendezvous being with Becky, helping in the free, unconventional

manner of the house, as she passed among the guests.

In the large dining-room auntie presided, giving a picture of her plans, in connection with Ned's desires, to an interested group circled about the table.

"I 'm going to keep the child with me a year at all events, though that dear old mother Kent almost compels me to shorten the time. I shall not give her up until she goes to her own home, which is to be my gift to Ned. He will build this winter, and within the year I suppose the old homestead will see the first wedding of the younger generation. We 'll try to make it as gay as yours, Dolly, so long ago. Ah me!"

Uncle Eric responded to the pathetic close of her long speech with a peal of laughter that drew Ned from the smaller room.

"What 's the fun, Uncle Eric?"

"Partly on your account, young man. Why are you stealing such a march on us? I 'm not yet convinced of your right to deprive us of Maggie. Defend yourself if you can."

"You should n't set the example. I 've been taught it was safe to follow your lead, sir."

The tables were turned. Ned rejoined the younger group, who were begging Dot for a song, and very soon her sweet tones drew Aunt Agnes to them. Her full contralto added to the

brightness of the evening. She gave them a sense of rich companionship, and gradually the elder party were drawn by the music, the two elements mingling most agreeably until the hour of separation and lively good-nights.

It would be pleasant to dwell upon the varying scenes of the following year, noting the progress our young friends made. Maggie was frequently interrupting her preparations for a Southern life to respond to calls from one and another sick-room, continuing the kindly oversight of the old rag-picker, who still looks upon her nurse Maggie as a ministering spirit. All noticed Barbara's unassuming response to demands—now a home to be made attractive for a friend, then a few days spent in cheering Mrs. Ellis in her loneliness, or in other quiet ways bringing friends to feel the need of her modest services.

Dot was still singing her way into hearts, not with mere selfish gratification, but in the Master's service. Etta, frank and outspoken still, gave her strong bright spirit to the mother's help in fitting four manly boys for valiant service in the world.

Nellie was still fluttering, but taking more frequent flights into the higher, purer atmosphere of unselfishness.

Clare was still rejoicing in the master's ap-

proval, rewarded by-and-by with an invitation to spend the long summer vacation with them across the ocean, so fulfilling a dream of her youth.

Thus they gathered up the days and strung them, as a maiden her pearls, with love and duty; not all were glowing with equal brightness, but there were none dark enough to check their spirits' overflow or chill their joyous ardor.

The long winter passed with its abundant opportunities, and summer days followed with bright rare gifts. Then came the friends from the South to spend a little time together in the dear old home and claim the reward of patient waiting.

Later Dr. Kent and wife joined them, and the sweet face of mother Kent beamed upon them with sympathetic beauty. It was less than a year since Maggie's return. How difficult to hide the joy they felt in the certainty of taking her back to dwell among them!

Just as October ripened into glorious beauty, waving gay signals on every hillside and lifting bright banners on every tree-top, there was a quiet family wedding in the ancient mansion, with everything to make it bright and hopeful but the certainty of separation that must follow. Barbara moved softly among a wealth of flowers for the final decoration, Becky surveyed

seriously the lavish display of her own particular province, and Aunt Clarissa carried on her face a grim smile that entirely failed to conceal from the friends the heart-ache beneath.

Despite the lurking pain, the shadow of a near breaking up, the seriousness of the ceremony, always tinged with solemnity to earnest souls, the farewells that followed were brightened with the hope of many a meeting in years to come.

At the last Maggie turned with moist eyes to Aunt Clarissa and was folded to her faithful heart. A whispered blessing met her ear: "God give you strength and grace, my child, to go on as you have begun, faithful to duty, ministering to all hearts 'in His name.'"

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